THE CLIMBER

NEW ZEALAND'S CLIMBING MAGAZINE

ISSUE 113
SPRING 2020

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE
NEW ZEALAND ALPINE CLUB

SNAPPED

Uprising holds are simply the best, smartest-designed and most bombproof climbing holds you'll find—and they're made by climbers right here in New Zealand.

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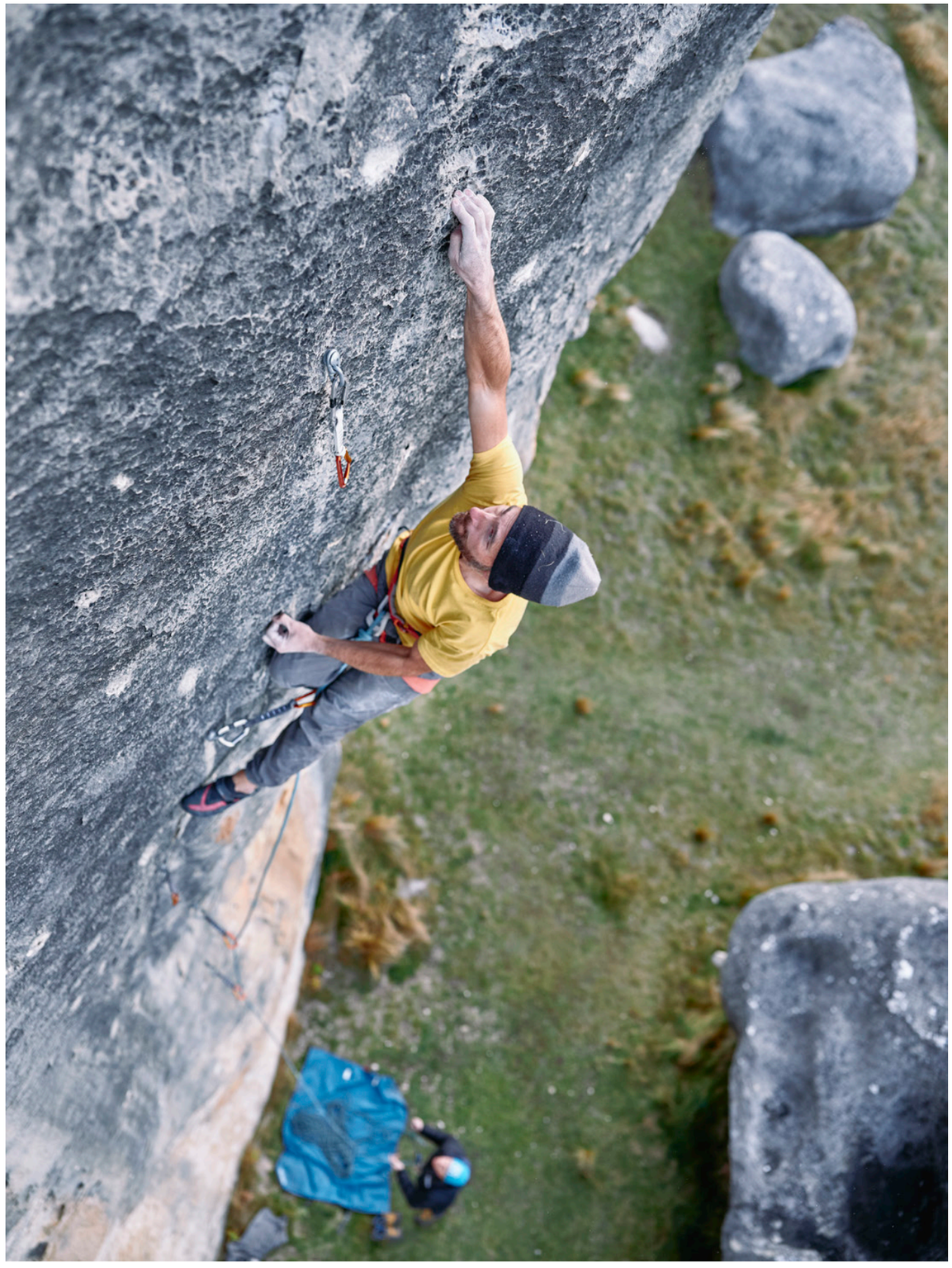
Eoin O'Mathuna having a blast during this winter's very short season on Wye Creek ice. PAUL ROGERS

CONTENTS

ON THE COVER
An aerial view of the eastern flank of Mount Aspiring. Popes Nose is in the foreground, with Coxcomb Ridge leading to the summit.
RACHSTEWARTPHOTOGRAPHY.COM

THIS PAGE
Sunset over the Franklin Mountains from a campsite on End Peak, with Lake Te Anau in the foreground.
DANILO HEGG

DEPARTMENTS



ABOVE John Palmer recently made a successful ascent of *Pumpkin* (29), at Castle Hill. John's ascent is likely the first in over 20 years, since the first ascent by Ivan Vostinar and a quick repeat by Richard Dale in 1998. TOM HOYLE

FOLLOWING PAGE Bruce Dowrick tackles the 'fishing tale move' on Pitch 2 of *The Big Fish* (26, 25, 25, 28, 26, 26). This new route was established this winter by Bruce, Jon Sedon and Llewellyn Murdoch. LLEWELLYN MURDOCH

CHOSS AND ICE

ISSUE 1 AUGUST 2020

REMARKABLY HONEST RUMOURS FROM NEW ZEALAND

ALERT LEVEL 2

THE CLIMBING WINDOW BEGAN TO CLOSE

HAVE YOU GOT THE SICKNESS?

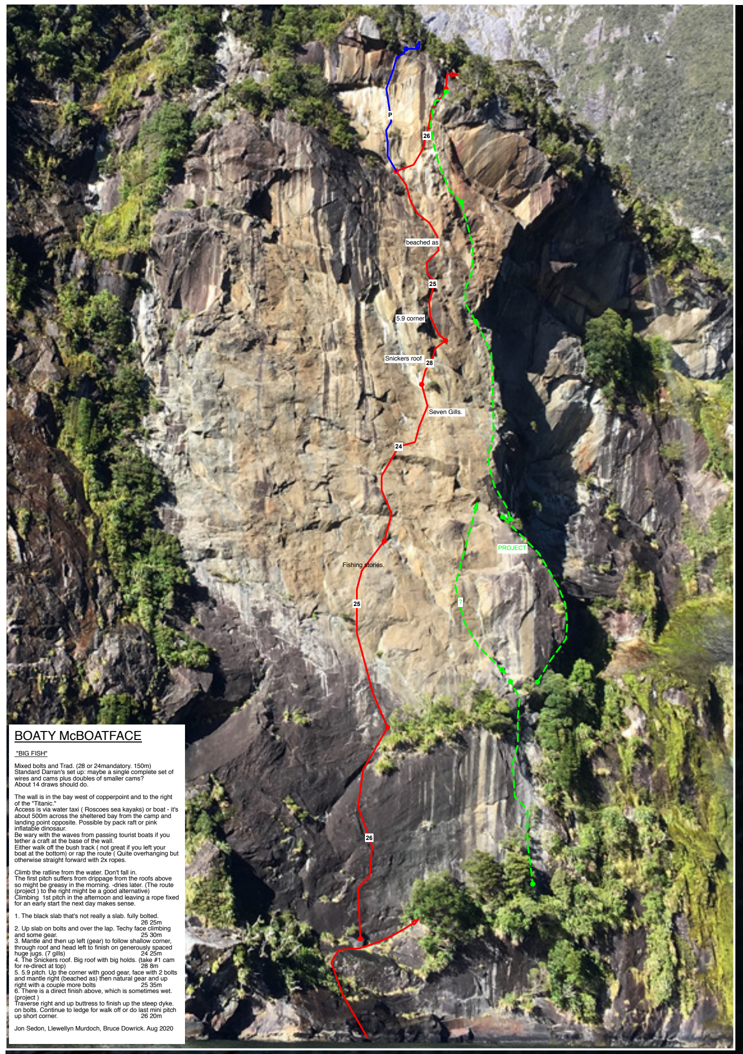
T-SHIRT HUMOUR ALMOST BACKFIRES

FULL REPORT FROM THE REMARKABLES ROCK CLIMBING IN CRAMPONS FESTVAL

"THERE REALLY WAS ICE... ON THE LAKE!"

9 788420 532318

GAVIN LANG


P
26
beached as
25
5.9 corner
Snickers roof
28
Seven Gills.
24
PROJECT
Fishing stories.
25
?
26
BOATY McBOATFACE
"BIG FISH"
Mixed bolts and Trad. (28 or 24mandatory. 150m)
Standard Darran's set up: maybe a single complete set of wires and cams plus doubles of smaller cams?
About 14 draws should do.
The wall is in the bay west of copperpoint and to the right of the "Titanic."
Access is via water taxi (Roscoes sea kayaks) or boat - it's about 500m across the sheltered bay from the camp and landing point opposite. Possible by pack raft or pink inflatable dinosaur.
Be wary with the waves from passing tourist boats if you tether a craft at the base of the wall.
Either walk off the bush track (not great if you left your boat at the bottom) or rap the route (Quite overhanging but otherwise straight forward with 2x ropes.
Climb the ratline from the water. Don't fall in.
The first pitch suffers from drippage from the roofs above so might be greasy in the morning. -dries later. (The route (project) to the right might be a good alternative)
Climbing 1st pitch in the afternoon and leaving a rope fixed for an early start the next day makes sense.
1. The black slab that's not really a slab. fully bolted. 26 25m
2. Up slab on bolts and over the lap. Techy face climbing and some gear. 25 30m
3. Mantle and then up left (gear) to follow shallow corner, through roof and head left to finish on generously spaced huge jugs. (7 gills) 24 25m
4. The Snickers roof. Big roof with big holds. (take #1 cam for re-direct at top) 28 8m
5. 5.9 pitch. Up the corner with good gear, face with 2 bolts and mantle right (beached as) then natural gear and up right with a couple more bolts 25 35m
6. There is a direct finish above, which is sometimes wet. (project)
Traverse right and up buttress to finish up the steep dyke. on bolts. Continue to ledge for walk off or do last mini pitch up short corner. 26 20m
Jon Sedon, Llewellyn Murdoch, Bruce Dowrick. Aug 2020

SAY SOMETHING

IT IS obviously time to stop using route names that refer to sexual violence or are otherwise derogatory. I would love to see objectifying names gone too, as they disgust me. The articles which were linked on the NZAC Facebook page and led to an extended online conversation were fairly straight forward (https://rockandice.com/tuesday-night-bouldering/between-the-lines-its-time-to-change-offensive-route-names/ and https://www.verticallifemag.com.au/2020/06/route-names-another-perspective/). But … Oh dear! The comments left me saddened and angry.

In the online conversation, there were many climbers of all backgrounds who agreed that names should be reviewed if 'offensive', but also people who said, 'It's not that bad.' Others said they felt 'hurt, excluded, belittled, threatened, demeaned, sickened and violated', so for some of us, it truly is that bad.

From my personal experience, I'm just *so* over women being minimalised, objectified and belittled in every aspect of life. Riding your bike or going climbing is no guaranteed relief. The experience is ubiquitous and it really is death by a thousand tiny cuts.

In the online conversation, people said things like, 'Grow a thicker skin,' 'If you want to rewrite the story of climbing to suit yourself, do it in your bedroom,' and 'You want a glossy climbing world? Stick to the gym right next to the supermarket and cafes.' I really hope the people who wrote those comments were just shooting from the hip and hadn't considered their replies.

If not, those people should reflect on why they feel more entitled to the communal space of climbing than a woman, and why they feel so comfortable to say something in public that is so dismissive, entitled and lacking in social capabilities.

Others said, 'Everyone's offended about everything,' and 'Why should we adapt to woke politics? Climbing is founded in dirtbag/anti-social foundations.' The answer is, simply, kindness. You are hurting those with whom you might share a campfire, sunny ledge or rope with. There is a contemporary climate for people to have their voices heard, and some of us are using it to merely ask that you treat us respectfully and kindly. It's not the politics of the moment. It's human decency.

We all deserve to feel safe and welcome when enjoying our time climbing, and by the comments of some, we do not. All the climbers who said supportive things on the Facebook page and those reading this can support us in real life. When people are going on about a person's attractiveness or lack thereof, if they're being derogatory about women, another race, sexuality, gender or anything else—just *say something* … 'That's not cool' would suffice. I've witnessed so many occasions when no one else has said anything in the face of very obviously bad behaviour. Knowing our friends and climbing community are with us would be amazing, and help to bring around the change that is sorely needed.

-Sally Ford

THIS ISSUE'S PRIZE GOES TO:
SALLY FORD

THE CLIMBER
NEW ZEALAND'S CLIMBING MAGAZINE

ISSUE 113, SPRING 2020

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For more info see climber.co.nz/contribute.
Contact us for payment rates.

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NZAC NEW ZEALAND ALPINE CLUB

SPORT NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand Alpine Club

Our vision: NZAC champions the pursuit of climbing, enabling skilled and active adventurers. We provide inspiration, information and seek to enable a vibrant climbing community.
Our core purpose is to foster and support climbing.

RETURN TO PRINT

PRINT PUBLICATIONS are an important member benefit for NZAC. We've received lots of feedback from members about the importance of printing the *New Zealand Alpine Journal* this year and we're pleased to announce this is now possible.

We've used this opportunity to review what we print and how we supply content to members, which does make for some significant changes for *The Climber* magazine. This will be the last issue of *The Climber* magazine as you know it. For a full update on the proposed future changes, including the merging of this publication with the *New Zealand Alpine Journal*, see page 14.

FEDERATED MOUNTAIN CLUBS D2U SERVICE

AS *THE CLIMBER* is no longer distributed quarterly in print form, FMC are offerring a new service for the delivery of *Backcountry* to members who have opted in to receive it and formerly found this included in their copies of *The Climber*. The 'D2U' service offers direct delivery of four issues of *Backcountry* per year, as well as an FMC discount card, for $20. NZAC will still be supplying FMC discount cards to members who have opted in but don't wish to sign up to the D2U service. Visit FMC's site for more details: http://www.fmc.org.nz/D2U.

NZAC HIGH ALPINE SKILLS COURSES

AFTER THE reduction of the National Instruction Programme courses over winter due to Covid, NZAC are delighted to announce the return of the popular High Alpine Skills Courses this summer. These courses are run by professional instructors and cost $1990 for members.

The dates for this year are: 3rd–8th November, 10th–15th November, 24th–29th November, 1st–6th December, 8th–13th December and 15th–20th December.

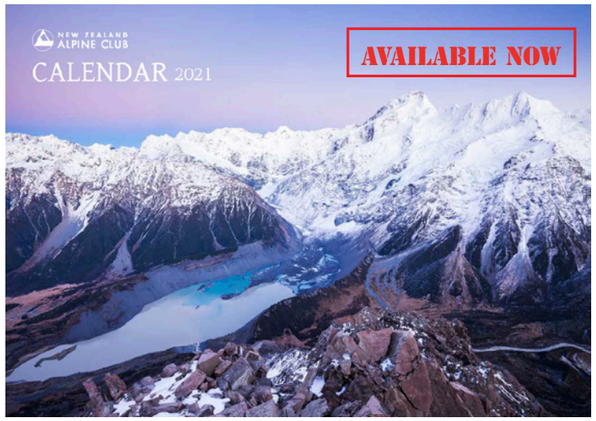
See the website for more details: https://alpineclub.org.nz/about-courses/hasc/.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

THE CLUB'S AGM will be held in Christchurch at 7pm, Friday 30 October. Venue t.b.a. Please save the date and attend if you are able. Online streaming of the meeting may be available, if possible. Further details will be provided closer to the time.

NZAC CALENDAR 2021

WHILE NZAC didn't have the capacity to run its annual photo competition this year, a calendar for 2021 has been made possible by the donation of images from many wonderful photographers who are supportive of the club. The calendar will cost $20 for members and $25 for non-members, including postage. Visit https://alpineclub.org.nz/product/nzac-calendar-2021/ to purchase.



ASPIRING HUT UPGRADE

ASPIRING HUT is in need of substantial upgrade work to meet building code requirements for earthquake strength and to repair deteriorating timber piles and floor beams. Please read the information about the upgrade here: https://alpineclub.org.nz/aspiring-hut-upgrade-feedback-wanted/?mc_cid=c04966883e&mc_eid=4484dba47a.

NZAC FUTURE DIRECTION IN PERIODICAL PUBLICATIONS

NZAC HAS long been the foremost publisher of writing and images by New Zealand climbers. Our premier publication, since 1891, has been the *New Zealand Alpine Journal*. Commonly referred to as simply *The Journal*, it is described on the Club's website as 'a record, source for research and a forum for reflection'. As well as a showcase for our members' talents and a hub for our community, *The Journal* forms the primary historical record of NZAC and New Zealand mountaineering activity.

NZAC began publishing *The Climber* magazine in 1992 to cater for those with an appetite for more frequent updates on climbing and Club news, and for information on climbing destinations, opinion, equipment and books. In particular, *The Climber* provided a home for the rapidly-increasing number of rock climbers in Aotearoa. Issued quarterly, the magazine is now 113 issues old and outnumbers the volumes of *The Journal*. It attracts a broader readership and significantly more advertising revenue, which funds not only printing costs but also some written and photographic contributions.

THE JOURNAL AND *THE CLIMBER* HAVE GROWN INCREASINGLY ALIKE

In recent years, the distinction between these two publications has been eroded. In the age of the internet, a quarterly publication no longer fulfills a role of timeliness, nor is it the best place for accessible information or notifications of Club events. *The Journal* still functions as a record of Club members' activities, but as the nature of members' activities has changed, so *The Journal's* role as a record of significant first ascents has decreased. More rock climbing accounts and more reflective pieces have increased the overlap with articles published in *The Climber*. Rock climbing is no longer widely considered a lesser form of mountaineering, and its popularity as a practised activity outstrips mountaineering. NZAC today represents all forms of climbing and fosters broadly inclusive mountain culture. It is time that the Club's premier publication did the same.

THE VALUE OF *THE JOURNAL* TO MEMBERS WILL BE MAINTAINED AND EXTENDED

The NZAC Board have accepted a recommendation from the publications committee to combine *The Journal* and *The Climber* into a single new-look *Journal*, published twice yearly.

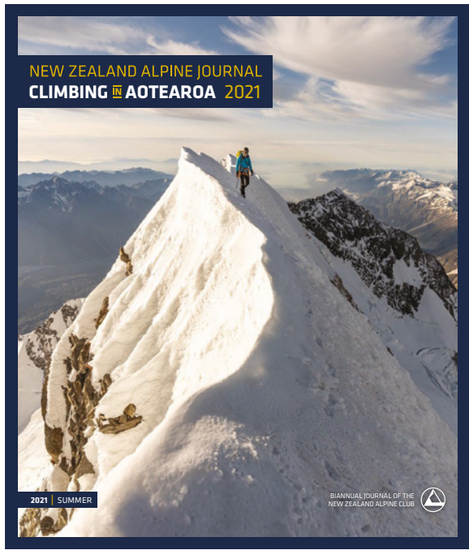
The committee recognises *The Journal* is dear to many New Zealand climbers. It is valued as a lasting record, as a reference, and as an iconic physical object that holds memories, emotions, ideas and communities within its pages. As climbing information is increasingly available online, the committee thinks the value of a high-quality printed publication is appreciated by almost all our members, and is seen as an integral part of the membership value of the Club. In continuing to produce one periodical publication, it is important that it is still identifiably *The Journal* and upholds that proud tradition.

The Climber has, over the years, developed its own form of excellence. In particular it has become a strongly visual publication. Visual appeal will be a key attribute that *The Climber* brings to the combined publication. This should be welcomed not only by the readership of *The Climber* that isn't shared with *The Journal*, but it will also hopefully encourage advertisers that currently support *The Climber* to also support *The Journal*.

CLIMBING IN AOTEAROA

The new, combined publication will strive to uphold these values:

- the tradition and historical significance of *The Journal*;
- the highest quality articles and imagery we can produce, justifying its value as a premier print publication;
- a broad inclusivity that welcomes climbers of all kinds; and
- increased visual appeal for both climbers and advertisers.



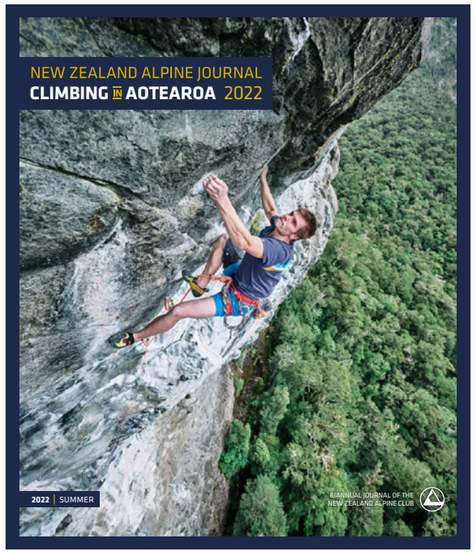
Merely discontinuing *The Climber* and continuing *The Journal* would fail to uphold these values. This is why a merger of the two publications is the best solution. As the tradition of *The Journal* is more significant, the new publication should be referred to as a journal so that it might still be considered '*The Journal*'. However, the term 'alpine', despite being present in the publisher's name, is not as inclusive a term as 'climber'. Many climbers who read *The Climber* undertake their activities without ever heading into alpine regions. A similar argument might be made that some who venture into the alpine regions (for example, skiers) don't consider themselves climbers and their activities are better expressed by the word 'alpine'. However, we suggest this is of lesser importance. The majority of those heading into the alpine regions are doing so for climbing, even if their primary focus may be skiing or some other type of descent rather than the climbing itself. Furthermore, these activities are nominally catered for by other existing publications. New Zealand climbers are solely represented by the publications of NZAC.

We recommend the title of the new publication reflects its dual heritage by maintaining the title *New Zealand Alpine Journal* (or NZAJ) but enhanced with a strapline. We think this new/old publication offers a unique opportunity to promote and reflect our unique heritage and so we propose using the strapline 'Climbing in Aotearoa'. This dual approach speaks to the history and tradition of *The Journal* while also acknowledging the parallel history of *The Climber* and welcoming those readers.

A NEW FORMAT WILL CREATE VISUAL IMPACT WHILE MAINTAINING READABILITY

Page size for the new journal will be 230 x 270 mm. Binding will be sewn as *The Journal* currently is, with a 250 gsm jacket but without folding flaps. Each issue will be 70 to 100 pages in full colour.

The page size of *The Climber* is more image-friendly than *The Journal*, being the same or closer to the common aspect ratios of the majority of modern photographic images. The squatter format of *The Journal* does not allow photographs to run full page unless they are heavily cropped. Making the page size more photo-friendly will not diminish the experience of the written words, and it will improve the visual impact and allow more flexibility in terms of layout.



TIMING

We propose publishing the new *Journal* in May and October each year, but with the first issue appearing in the place of this year's *Journal* in December 2020/January 2021. The seasonal timing will allow publication of articles primarily on summer and winter climbing respectively. Publication in May and October will appeal to advertisers as it precedes the winter and summer climbing seasons respectively.

A REFRESHED WEBSITE IS CRUCIAL TO THIS PROPOSAL

Content from *The Climber* that is less appropriate for *The Journal* should be able to be easily presented and accessed online—along with new media content—on a blog-style platform. Currently the Club's website is unstable and cannot efficiently provide information and services to members and non-members as was originally intended. Improving the functionality of the existing website is a crucial part of this publishing proposal and will allow the site to become an online hub for New Zealand climbing over time, one that provides all appropriate club services—including the new membership system—as well as news and climbing information.


Nick Shearer

NZAC PRESIDENT ELECT: CLARE KEARNEY

IT IS a privilege to become the NZAC President-elect and I feel honoured to be following in the footsteps of the great leaders of our Club.

By way of introduction, I am relatively new to climbing and to NZAC. I joined in 2015 because we have a great local section in North Otago, and I wanted to challenge myself to start climbing. I enjoy being in the mountains and have done a bit of trekking—but I am no alpinist.

I come from a primary production background, having graduated from Lincoln with an Agricultural Science degree and a Masters in Professional Studies a few years later. I am a Kellogg's Rural Scholar and I am currently chipping away at a Graduate Diploma in Arts, majoring in philosophy. My husband Kevin and I own a block of land on the outskirts of Ōamaru, where we run beef cattle.

When not thinking of all things governance, I enjoy travel, especially to Nepal, where I have been fortunate enough to have trekked three times.

I am experienced in governance, having started 28 years ago with a school Board of Trustees. I am now a Chartered Fellow of the Institute of Directors and I have assisted the institute with a number of governance-training events. I chaired Network Waitaki, our local electricity distribution company for nine of my 12 years on the board, finishing in 2017. I currently chair Sport Otago and our local Waitaki Safer Communities Trust, and have been a director on the board of Southport Ltd since 2016. I have had a number of diverse governance appointments, but the common denominator, I believe, is community.

NZAC, to me, is no different. It is a community of members with diverse experiences but a common purpose to climb, develop climbers, and respect the environment we all enjoy. Along with the skills to do this, there are the social and personal benefits to membership of our Club.

The change to a governance model of leadership is one that I have had some involvement with as an interim board member in 2018/19. Our aim then was to have processes and policies in place to support the incoming elected board members.

Appointment to President-elect is an opportunity for me to support the Club to further this development and help build on the great work of the current board.

Our Club is full of volunteers who use their skills to benefit their local sections and the Club in general. The things I enjoy doing are helping stack the firewood pile at Elcho Hut on our annual winter maintenance weekend, fundraising to enable our North Otago section bouldering room to happen, and helping children have a go at climbing—seeing their excitement in achieving something they thought they couldn't do is very rewarding.

I wish that I had started climbing sooner, but I think it's good to start these things anyway. It certainly makes me appreciate the achievements of others.

The Club, for me, is here to deliver for the current members but to also keep a focus on what future members will need. Governance is about setting the Club's sights on that future, and supporting our general manager and her team to be able to move toward it. The board is accountable to all members to do this well.

-Clare Kearney

SEEKING THE LIGHT with GAVIN LANG

INTERVIEW BY **TOM HOYLE**
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **GAVIN LANG**

GAVIN LANG'S alpine photographs will be familiar with regular readers of this publication—he regularly graces the cover and 'Exposure' pages with his inspirational images. Those who follow his activities more closely will have noted that he seems to have been especially productive in the last year. Putting his guiding work on hiatus, Gavin is part way through an audacious project to climb, photograph and film ascents of each of the 24 peaks in New Zealand which stand 3000m or higher. *The Climber* caught up with Gavin to talk about his new project and the challenges involved.

Tom: Where did the idea for the *Seeking the Light* project come from?
Gavin: Lots of sources. The project germinated over a long time, but the first spark came with the idea of creating a film featuring select New Zealand mountains. This was directly influenced by reading Hugh Logan's *Classic Peaks* in 2004.

The project seems quite ambitious, not just in terms of the climbing, but in having writing, stills and video about each ascent. Was that always the plan from the start?
Yes. Once I focused in on the end goals, I stopped being concerned about the madness of combining them all. Each task will have its turn, and just like climbing a mountain, I'm taking one step at a time.

It must have been quite a leap of faith to decide not to guide for this period of time and focus solely on the *Seeking the Light* project?
It was. I considered limiting how much guiding I would do so I could still serve my clients and maintain a buffer of income, but what I needed most was complete flexibility. I needed to be able to act on incoming high pressure, and that was always going to mean a compromise in how much guiding I did or how long the project would take. In the end, I felt a stronger pull towards the project despite the uncertainty around income.

Has what happened since then, with Covid, reduced any angst around that decision?
I guess it has, in a way. I'm lucky that the decision not to guide was mine. I had already blocked the summer out for guiding, wound back expenses almost a year before I started on the first mountain, and I only had my overseas trips on the books for May and June this year. When Covid came along

ABOVE Traversing New Zealand's highest mile across Aoraki / Mt Cook on a morning tinged with yellow/orange haze from the Australian bushfires.

TOP RIGHT Owen Lee, Petrouchka Steiner-Grierson and Brendan Maggs rising up one of the final ridges of Mt Hamilton in preparation for a ski descent. Below them is the Darwin and Tasman Glacier confluence.

BOTTOM RIGHT Lukas Kirchner climbing through one of the worst sections of unstable choss en route to Malaspina on the steep, narrow ridgeline north of Mt Vancouver.

it was disappointing, but I wasn't trying to expand my operation, deal with huge overheads or maintain staff.

When you have a big list objective of this kind and a relatively short timeframe, does the added pressure lead to any compromise in safety margin? How have you dealt with that aspect of planning each ascent?

I can't and I won't compromise on safety and that ties in well with wanting good weather for photographs. I could do this a lot quicker if I was prepared to climb in more inclement weather.

I gave myself 12-18 months to complete the physical climbs, and that is tracking along well. I waited all winter in 2019 to get started, and when the good weather finally arrived on the very last day of winter, I was off to a good start, climbing and skiing three mountains in four days.

Waiting for fine spells longer than two days is a massive exercise in patience, but three-to-six-day windows tend to reduce the risks. The avalanche danger usually decreases, there is less of a rush because of the good weather buffer, and if plan A doesn't work, plan B can be implemented the following day. All three of the 'failures' so far have happened during short weather windows. The trick is not necessarily to stay home during the short weather windows—because some of them have produced good results—but to judge when is a good time to call it quits. Sometimes it's obvious (too slow in soft conditions), sometimes it's too windy, sometimes there's too much uncertainty about the snowpack, and sometimes it's a gut feeling. Intuition is underrated. Emotion is overrated. And knowing the difference is a skill that's worth working on.

How many of the 24 3000ers had you climbed before, and did you take a different approach for the ones you aren't doing for the first time?

I had already climbed 15 of them, some dozens of times. Most importantly, I wanted to capture a number of variables and have a balance of ski mountaineering objectives, rock climbing objectives, mixed and pure ice, plus some first ascents. The line I chose didn't have to meet any group consensus of being the 'classic three-star' representative route, but rather being part of a collection of the styles, flavours and experiences possible on New Zealand's highest peaks. I'm not really motivated by ticking arbitrary lists, but the challenge of climbing all 24 of New Zealand's 3000m peaks is a good framework to hang the story on. If I'd already climbed a route previously and found it to be really aesthetic, I often considered this same route again, or a variation of it either on ascent or descent, depending on the available light.

Walking under the giants of Mt Vancouver, Mt Dampier, Aoraki and Mt Hicks on day two of the Torres-Tasman traverse. As we climbed and scrambled through the upper reaches of the Fox Range, we appreciated the size and magnitude of the countryside more and more with every step.

You seem to have been climbing with a range of different partners, which probably comes more naturally to someone who has done a lot of guiding. Was it always your intention to climb on this project with a broad range of people, or is it more a practical issue of who is available at the right time?

It's definitely the latter. Climbing with regular partners is still better for everyone involved, but it's always worth venturing into the unknown to develop new friendships. I was halfway through the project before I climbed with the same partner twice. I'd hoped to have two teams on each route to give me more people or teams to shoot, but that's only happened once so far. Thankfully, I've always been able to find a competent partner, even at the 11th hour, and I haven't had to solo climb and photograph anything. That would be tedious. I'm also hoping to capture a snapshot of who's climbing in New Zealand right now and that's working out well by pure chance.

What has been your favourite climb so far, and why?

The Torres -Tasman traverse, simply because of the sheer scale of doing it in winter.

I knew this would involve moving unroped on exposed terrain for long periods, but that wasn't my biggest concern. The extreme cold played on my mind the most. I wanted to climb it in winter for the best conditions (not temperatures), but last year the conditions and weather never eventuated. I dreamt of climbing it as a walk in-walk out affair to highlight that despite our broken glaciers, it is still possible. I always anticipated the lightweight winter bivvies to be bitter cold, but in the end it never seemed to be that much colder than a summer bivvy.

It was my third big trip with Ruari Macfarlane and we were both tuned into each other, the environment and in flow. I got sick and delayed our summit day, so when Ruari and I finally made it to the summit on day four, a strangely mild and largely windless day, it felt like the perfect culmination of events. We took another two days to walk out, but we just got giddier the longer we were on our feet.

Least favourite?

La Perouse. Not because of the climb, the challenge or the company—but simply because of how hard it is to photograph a route that's in the shadow of Aoraki.

This large, accommodating crevasse just below the Middle Peak summit of Aoraki / Mt Cook is a spectacular place to spend the night when planned, and a safe haven for many climbers in hostile weather. Mark Inglis and Phil Doole were trapped here for two weeks in 1982. La Perouse and the West Coast below.

Your particular approach to mental health and climbing is something you are quite active in talking about, and a really crucial aspect of your climbing motivation and philosophy. Is that all going to be represented in the *Seeking the Light* book/film too?
That is the real motivation for this project. I believe we all know intuitively how nature, adventure and contact with the mountain environment is good for us on so many levels. It's so much more than just a self-centred pursuit. My goal is to explore this in detail. The two different mediums—book and film—will address different aspects of the deep, hidden, somewhat mystical attractions that we have for the mountains.

Has the climbing itself been challenging for you? Or are the logistics of getting the right conditions in the time available and being able to shoot as you climb more challenging?
I have been challenged on every level. My general fitness has remained good and I seem to have no issue with long days, heavy packs, etc. But recently, on steep ice, I realised that my forearms were pretty weak. I've worked on that pretty much every day since. I can't control the timing of the weather or conditions; I just have to work with what's available. What I have found challenging is that just when I think I have something dialled, some anomaly shows up. The mistakes I make are usually related to applying the short-term memory of the last mountain I climbed to the gear I take on the next one— either too much, too little, or the wrong tools … as much ice axes as camera gear.

Producing high quality photographs of the mountains is quite challenging from a landscape photography point of view, let alone doing it while on the mountain and trying to capture the climbing also. But what you are producing is some really stunning work. Can you describe how you've overcome the obstacles of mastering this kind of photography, and what you've had to do differently to get the results you've achieved?
I don't feel like I've mastered it. I'm just motivated to try to get shots that interest me, and I keep refining the process. Landscape photography is typically of relatively stationary subjects, but my biggest thrill is capturing the energy of a wild landscape with someone moving through it. I want to be able to move fast and light so I can move ahead or stay behind my climbing partners without getting them to stop. I don't want the process to get bogged down with retakes as it's not a commercial shoot.

I want full frame quality with great dynamic range (low light sensitivity). I completely switched brands about five years ago to achieve this and save some precious grams. Gear wise, if in doubt, I leave it out. I pick one lens before I head out the door and make it work. If I carry a second, it often stays in my pack. I also carry a tiny tripod that weighs just 50g. It's barely even strong enough to hold the camera and lens, but I can support the tripod with rocks or rope in order to capture time lapses or long exposures. I also carry my camera on the front in everything but the steepest sections so that I never have to stop, take my pack off and pull it out. I know that the best photographs in rock climbing could be reproduced on a steep alpine route, but it's infinitely more complicated. Rappelling off the top and hanging at the crux, possibly with flash photography and a quiver of lenses, is not practical at all. I'm really motivated to climb the routes myself and I want the process to be fun and uncluttered.

Specifically for filming, I've also got my ideal 'rig'. I add a microphone that weighs just 85g to improve audio quality, and a variable neutral density filter in order to get the desired frame rate for cinematic filming. A gimbal is out of the question so I'm very glad to have a camera with great internal stabilisation and added optical stabilisation on the lenses. I also shoot action through the steep sections on a helmet-mounted action camera.

Is there anything still on the list to do that you think is going to be really hard to pull off?
Yes, the South Face of Hicks has already proven to be tricky, conditions wise, and it may end up being more of a mixed climb. The fat ice there once was on the South Face seems to be a thing of the past. But I've seen it form up in December and January in the recent past, so it may just happen at the last minute.

When do you hope to be finished and have the book and film ready?
I hope to finish the climbing by October/November and the writing by early next year. Once the book is with the publishers, I will begin on the video post production with a release date of October 2021. If something falls out of sequence due to conditions, Covid, or funding, then the project could be delayed a year. I just hope to get all my photography, film and writing ideas documented properly. This will be a really fun project to pull off.

For updates on Gavin's project, visit : https://seekingthelight.co.nz/blog/

ABOVE After completing a new route (*Kia Rapu i Tōku Māramatanga*) on the South Face of Mt Aspiring, Sooji Clarkson organises the rope and we head upwards along the Coxcomb Ridge. But not for long. The South Face was shady and cold and now that we're in the sun, we have to contend with strong winds.

TOP LEFT David Henley and Ruari MacFarlane scope ahead on a warm summer's morning on the North Ridge of Mt Sefton.

BOTTOM LEFT Ben Sanford snowboarding down Newton Pass, with Pioneer Ridge, Haast, Lendenfeld, Tasman and Torres as a backdrop.

EDDIE FOWKE:
IFSC Photographer

INTERVIEW BY **TOM HOYLE**
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **EDDIE FOWKE**

EDDIE FOWKE is the official photographer for the International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC). The IFSC runs the World Cup competition series for Speed, Lead and Boulder, as well as the World Championship events that now include the Combined (Olympic) category. These events are the pinnacle of climbing competitions and feature many of the world's best climbers, especially since the announcement of climbing's inclusion in the Olympics. Eddie is the only New Zealander consistently involved in competitions at this level, but with many of this season's events cancelled or postponed, we thought it was time to check in with him and discuss life on the circuit.

Tom: So you're back in New Zealand now. It must be quite strange being here under these circumstances when you'd usually be in the thick of the IFSC World Cup season.
Eddie: Yes, for sure. If there is one way to sum up 2020, it would be 'surreal'. I've been on the road for many years, and this was supposed to be the biggest yet, with so many major events like the Olympics scheduled.

The normal season must be hectic with all the travel and the many hours of competitions to cover. Do you usually take a complete break outside of the competition season, or do you have other things happening at that time?
The season can get pretty insane at times, with the amount of travel and shooting being really challenging. Last August, for example, I shot ten days in a row at the World Champs in Hachioji, Japan. Then, as soon as the event finished, I jumped on the first of three trains from the venue to the airport and took two flights which got me to Milan, in Italy. From there, it was straight onto another two trains, then a bus, and I was in Arco, Italy, in the middle of the first day of Youth World Champs. So that ended up being 20 days shooting out of 21, with only the time traveling counted as a day off.

So, after the season, which is normally the end of November, I collapse in a heap for a couple of weeks. In December and January, I'm normally climbing or shooting, but more for myself, only doing work for clients as an aside. Normally I like to go somewhere with the pro climbers, as after all these years they're my main group of friends. For the last four years, it has been time split between North America, Spain and Ticino in Switzerland.

Then my first comps of the year are usually in February.

How did you end up becoming the official photographer for the IFSC?
Well, as many of the older crowd in New Zealand might remember, I competed here from the mid-'90s until the early 2000s. My dream was always to be good enough to go to World Cups, but I never was. Then, in 2002, I busted up my left knee doing a silly drop-knee and that was the end of that.

I walked away from climbing completely for around six years, as I was frustrated with no longer being able to climb at the level I wanted to. I moved to Australia, got a real job and poured myself into photography, mostly shooting motorsport, mountain biking and athletics.

In 2009, I started climbing again as I had got really fat and figured I had to do something, and of course this time I brought along my camera.

In 2013, my friend James Kassay was planning to do the Euro World Cup rounds and invited me along. By the end of the first World Cup, I knew this was where I belonged. The next season I managed to do more of the events and the IFSC approached me to be their photographer. The rest, as they say, is history.

Hannes Puman of Sweden holding the swing on a lead route at the 2019 World Championships.

Adam Ondra, always the technician, acknowledges the crowd while milking a kneebar rest on the outdoor wall in Chamonix, France.

Do you still get a buzz out of the competitions now that you've been doing this for a while? Or do they seem like a normal work day?
I get a huge buzz out of the competitions. If anything, they get harder. Not as people might expect, because they've become routine, but instead because over the years many of the climbers have become great friends. This means I end up riding the emotional waves of their successes and failures.

The lead-up to Olympic qualifying and last year's World Championships created quite a lot of drama. Do you have a favourite moment from the competitions you've covered?
It's really hard to pinpoint individual moments as favourites—there are so many memorable ones. I have photographed more than a hundred World Cups, and if you include all the other events I've shot, the tally is over 150. One that stands out, though, would be seeing Stasa Gejo winning World Games Bouldering in 2017 in Poland. Stasa had a tough qualifier and just snuck into the finals in sixth place. She came up to me after the round and was completely emotionally worn out. All she wanted to do was quit. To see her come back from that and then win was an amazing experience.

Another moment that was special was seeing Janja Garnbret win Boulder, Lead and Combined in Tokyo last year, becoming the top seed for the Olympics along the way. I've known Janja since she was first year Youth A, and to see her rise through all the pressure that was on her was pretty special.

People who follow the competition scene are pretty familiar with the climbers and their climbing styles, but you have the rare opportunity of interacting with them outside of having their game faces on. Who is the most interesting athlete to talk to and are any quite different behind the wall to what you might expect from when they are on camera?
Wow, tricky one. When you're watching a comp, you get such a two-dimensional picture of who the climbers are. Once you travel with them and get to know them as friends over the years, you end up with a vastly different perspective. I love hanging out with Hannes Puman of Sweden—one of the nicest people you will ever meet, and so incredibly talented. Same with the likes of Alex Khazanov, from Israel. The drive of the climbers who come from countries that aren't World Cup powerhouses is incredibly inspiring.

I also really enjoy spending time with the Russian climbers. Hearing the older members of their team talk about the difficulties of life in post-Soviet Russia and what they had to overcome is incredible. For us, we climb because it's fun. It's something we love to do. When you talk to someone like Dmitrii Sharafutdinov about what he had to overcome to get to the top of the sport and how much he was putting on the line … it's incredibly eye-opening.

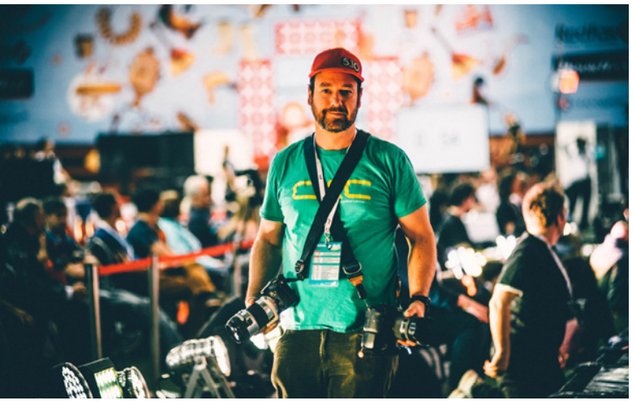
Now that you've been back in New Zealand for a little while and attended a few competitions here, how do you think the competition scene and climbing scene in general in New Zealand differs from the rest of the world?
That's tough. In terms of the competition scene I don't think it's fair to say we're not on the same page. It's more like we aren't even reading the same book. Realistically, to make the semifinals at a World Cup, a female competitor would need to be capable of flashing 8a+ (30) routes, and a guy around 8b/8b+ (31/32).

New Zealand doesn't make good competition climbers because we don't give them the tools, the mental and physical multipotentiality they need to succeed. The gyms I have been to in New Zealand are setting to a style from the late '90s, maybe early 2000s at best. This does not mirror what climbers will face on the international stage. It would be like teaching someone to ride a road bike, then entering them in a BMX World Cup. Yes, the fitness might be there, but there's a complete lack of understanding of the technical skills, rhythm and all the other complex elements of climbing.

As for outdoors, I can't really comment on that. We've had some strong climbers who have progressed the sport, which is great, but I've not been to any of the areas where the level is being pushed so I can't have an opinion.

TOP The lead World Cup event at Chamonix is an iconic part of the World Cup circuit. For this leg, an outdoor wall is erected in the centre of this historic climbing town and the crowds pack in to watch the competitors against the backdrop of the Aiguille du Midi.

BOTTOM Climbing competitions can have dramatic and often cruel outcomes for the competitors. This was even more the case in 2019, as qualifying for the Tokyo Olympics became the focus of many athletes and added another layer of pressure and complication in the results of many events.



If there's one thing we could do to remedy the gap in standards, what would it be?
We need to encourage diverse setting in gyms and begin to understand what training means. I think the two go hand-in-hand, but without the setting, you'll never get progression. We still climb in a very 'pull and lock' style, and that is so basic there can be no real progression in the modern, movement-based style of climbing. We need to understand how to climb in uncomfortable positions, how to be flexible, how to use momentum to our benefit. And without setting which encourages this, it's impossible to teach.

Do you have any gems of advice for aspiring New Zealand competition climbers if they want to break into the World Cup scene?
You don't understand what training is. Get used to that thought, because to climb at a World Cup level, you're really starting from scratch. Don't have an ego about it. Have an open mind and expect to be shut down. You will be.

Oh, and (once Covid is over) go to Japan. Geographically, they are reasonably close to us, and they have world-class setting at their gyms. Try and book some sessions with a coach first, and then go and learn the craft. I think getting climbers to Japan is really the number one way we raise the standard here.

What does the future look like for you, assuming that competitions can re-start at some point later this year or the next? Do you have accreditation for shooting climbing at the Olympics?
Yes, I'm accredited for the Olympics, and I'm incredibly excited for it. I hope for a degree of normality to return next year and I'm aiming to return to Europe for the beginning of the season with Dockmasters in the Netherlands in February. Of course, Covid has the last say in that for now…

What camera and lens is your go-to for shooting with at the comps and climbing in general?
I've been a Sony shooter since around 2008 and imagine I always will be. Currently I use the A7iii. I only brought one with me to NZ but at World Cups I'll normally shoot with two or three bodies so I can have my go-to lens mounted and ready. In terms of lens, access and angles dictate my choice, but always a 70-200mm F4, a 24-105mm F4 and normally an 85mm F1.4. Then I have a 14-24mm F2.8 for wide work. I also have a 70-200mm F2.8, a 300mm F4 prime and a 24-70mm F2.8—but only use them for non-flyaway (European rounds) as my carry-on is already around 15kg even without them and the F4s are smaller and lighter.

TOP Eddie all geared-up and ready to shoot. EVGENIIA ALEKSEEVA

BOTTOM Crowd favourite Jernej Kruder of Slovenia celebrates mid-air after clinching victory at the 2018 Boulder World Cup event in Meiringen, Swirzerland.

TOP RIGHT Shauna Coxsey of Great Britain made a steady return from injury in 2019, finishing the year strongly with third place in the Combined (Olympic) format at the World Championships in Hachioji, Japan.

BOTTOM RIGHT Slovenia's Janja Garnbret is a true superstar of the sport. In 2019, Janja became the first athlete to win every leg of a single Boulder World Cup season. She also won in all three disciplines at the World Championships.

It was when we saw it from Phipps Peak. 'What is *that* mountain?' we asked each other. A quick check of the topo map on the phone told us it was Mt Franklin. It's not the highest mountain, at 2145m, but it sticks proudly above anything else around it and has a certain attractive geometry—from our vantage point, it strongly resembled a phillips head screwdriver. We probably made a vague agreement to go climb it someday, and that seed of an idea sank slowly to the bottom of our minds, lying dormant beneath the shifting sands of work obligations, life circumstances and family commitments. Two years passed before the universe conspired to bring about the necessary conditions for that dormant seed to re-emerge, and the froth of keenness to get out into the hills provided the nourishment for this seed to sprout forth. And sprout forth it did.

And so it was that at 4:20am on a cold Saturday morning in mid-June, our alarms went off, and Nick Latty and I got up for a quick brew and porridge at Nick and Kelly's house in Lyttleton. We barrelled through to Arthur's Pass in the dark of the pre-morning, the outside temperature showing numbers well into the negatives. We parked the car at Greyneys Shelter, and I jogged on the spot to keep warm while Nick made a final adjustment to his pack and locked the car.

7:20 am. *Be bold, start cold.* We both were wise enough to heed this golden rule. After a quick karakia and mihi to the area, we were puffing our way up the wide riverbed with heavy packs, our head-torches on under a clear sky filled with stars. We crossed the Bealey River, feeling the first shock of frigid snowmelt water on our legs. When you commit to walking through a river and getting your feet wet, the sensation can actually be quite pleasant. We were on our way and it felt good.

The valley branched into two and we took the Mingha valley, continuing on over the riverbed for a few kilometres before the valley narrowed and the track entered the bush on the true right. Colours appeared in the sky and, as it brightened, we could now turn off our head-torches. We made good time up the track and through the bush. The Coast to Coast race comes through this track, hence it is well worn-in and there are even boardwalk sections built over the marshier terrain.

Miromiro chirps in his perch, hesitantly showing himself to the fast-moving trampers. 'Kei te aha kōrua?' What is your business here? he asks. They pause to say 'hello', watch him for a few moments, then push on.

It was good, fast travel to Mingha Bivouac, a charming, bright orange two-bunk shelter with an open fireplace. We sat on the log outside and had a quick muesli bar and a drink of water before pushing on, knowing Goat Pass Hut was only a couple more kilometres up the track.

Somewhere on Goat Pass, the two travellers step over the main divide, that amazing invisible line where a drop of water descending from the sky hits the whenua and divides into two, one half gushing down the steep, rugged West Coast bush valleys and rivers to emerge into Te Tai o Rehua, the Tasman Sea, while the other half meanders slowly east down through the foothills, through the great plains of Canterbury, before emerging into Te Moana nui a Kiwa, the Pacific Ocean.

Despite some treacherous, icy conditions on the track, we arrived at Goat Pass Hut at 10:30am. We made a cup of tea, ate our sandwiches, and sat on the deck basking in the welcome sunshine. Setting off from the hut, the track drops into a stream which we boulder-hopped down until we met the Deception River. Hidden patches of ice on the boulders made travel sketchy. I discovered my approach boots were not only coming apart (which I knew), but also had basically no tread left on the sole (news to me). Combined with the thin socks I was wearing and the heavy pack swinging around

on my back, this gave me a couple of near-spills and shook my confidence a bit. Nick, in his nice, light trail shoes, was steaming ahead and I felt clumsy and slow at the back. We continued down the Deception River, crossing a bunch of times, slipping on icy rocks, and getting our packs caught on the overhanging bushes.

Neinei (Dracophyllum Traversii) watches as the travellers push their way through the narrow track, eyes down, always watching for the next foot placement. Its fallen leaves catch their eye. They stop and look up. 'Yes, here I am. I've been here the whole time. You were just in too much of a rush to look up and notice me.' They admire its strong uniqueness and rugged beauty, take a couple of photos, and then continue on, resolving to not always be in such a rush as to miss the taonga hiding in plain sight all around them.

I was happy when we finally arrived at the bottom of the large scree slope, which was to be our magical staircase up onto the flanks of the peaks below Mt Franklin. The scree slope wasn't as bad as we had anticipated. There were lots of bigger rocks, so if you judiciously selected the right rock and added your weight in a certain way, most of the time it would support your weight without shifting, and you could make your way up without too much fuss. Reaching the top of the scree slope, we began a long, tedious sidle that involved descending slightly onto other scree slopes, which then had to be awkwardly traversed. Much scree-traversing followed until we finally came around the corner and into the wide basin of Good Luck Creek. Sitting down on a sunny tussock slope for a rest, I lay back and promptly fell asleep for a power nap. We changed into our mountain boots here and stashed our wet approach shoes under a big rock, and breathed in some wholesome air for good measure.

From here we were into the snow, and it was nice to be in it. We stopped to fill up our water bottles in a flowing spot in the creek, as we expected the lakes above to be frozen over. A long, easy snow slope led up to the little outlier lake below Lake Anna. We were both pretty puffed by the end of it and took turns kicking steps into the snow crust. We arrived at the small frozen lake. The wind was really funnelling through here and it was very cold. We continued up the last slope to Lake Anna hoping to find a more sheltered spot, but found it was much the same, with no shelter in sight.

The maunga shyly hides its head in the swirling clouds. She does not want them to see her yet. Tawhirimatea asserts himself with strong gusts, each one sapping the heat from their bodies and reminding them that they are in a different realm now, far away from safety and comfort.

We could see the ridge above the lake—this would be our route in the morning. But how to get onto it? A couple of options looked okay, but it was hard to tell from that far away. We didn't have time for a closer reccy, as the sun was going down and we needed to find shelter. We decided on a possible route and committed the details to memory, as it would be dark in the morning. We retreated down to the smaller lake hoping to find a sheltered spot, but didn't have much luck. It was seriously cold in the wind and, for a couple of moments, we looked at each other and wondered what we had gotten ourselves in for.

Nick suggested a spot which we had previously rejected, a big boulder with a slightly overhung cavity underneath. I had expressed the opinion that it would take too much excavation to be able to fit both of us in under it, but we were getting desperate to get out of the wind and we now decided that this was our best option. We huddled behind the boulder in its partial shelter and got some more warm clothes on, and got the stove boiling for a hot cup of tea and tomato soup, which boosted morale. After a few swigs on the wee bottle of whisky we had brought with us, we were ready to tackle the task of carving out a flattish spot underneath this boulder that was to be our home for the night.

A small slice of moana glistens through a gap in the ranges to the west. Tama-nui-te-Ra gives the campers his last warming rays for the day, providing more psychological comfort than actual warmth. 'See you fellas on the flipside,' he says as he dips in behind the maunga. 'It's going to be a cold night. Good luck.'


Nick Latty

We had not brought a spade, so we employed our snow stakes to good effect, clearing out the snow and rocks from beneath the boulder. This was a long process, and the bottle of whisky provided much needed comfort and motivation while we undertook the mammoth task. Many big rocks had to be levered out using the stakes. After an hour of work, we were getting close to something we could both fit in. But a very big rock—probably close to 200kg—lay right in the middle of our desired platform. This one stubborn rock was going to ruin all our work. After a valiant effort to manhandle it, we were forced to come up with a new plan: to dig it deeper down where it lay and attempt to bury it. We achieved this by rolling it to one side, digging, rolling it back, and digging some more until it was just low enough to not be a complete pain in the ass (literally).

Our work finally done after two hours of hard yakka, we lay out our bivvy bags, blew up our mats, and unpacked our sleeping bags. Our dehydrated kumara and chickpea curries tasted wonderful. But as it is with a winter bivvy on the mountain, there is always more work to do. We set off up to Lake Anna to attempt to chip through the ice to get to the precious water below. I have always found moving around in the dark a really interesting experience. Everything seems different, much different to how it is in the daytime. You could swear you are in a completely different place sometimes.

We got to the lake and hesitantly stepped to the edge, mindful that if we broke through the ice and got wet now we would be in big trouble. We needn't have worried. I chipped and chipped away at the ice with the adze of my ice axe, then the pick, before we realised that this was no thin layer of ice on the lake. We would not be able to get through to the water. Stuffing shards of chipped ice into our water bottles as a consolation prize, we returned to the boulder—which we had named Hotel Anna—and I fired up the stove to melt the ice into water, which we would store inside our sleeping bags overnight so that it wouldn't freeze. This would speed us up in the morning.

We shuffled awkwardly into our bivvies, sides almost touching, with our boots on so that they also would not freeze overnight. Hotel Anna did its job, giving us just enough shelter from the biting wind. We said goodnight.

As two friends lay side by side high on the mountain, trying to make themselves comfortable in the rugged surroundings, there to challenge themselves against adversity and the cold and a high mountain, the stars watch on in silence. They have seen this all before.

After a not-too-appalling night, our alarms sounded at 4.20am. We began the process of wriggling out of our bivvies, putting gloves on before the snow robbed our fingers of precious warmth, and firing up the stove for a hot brew. Powdered coconut milk was brewed up to provide delicious warmth to our muesli/weetbix breakfast concoctions and a 'pretty-legit-for-the-situation' coffee. We packed up our bivvies and left them with our little remaining food under Hotel Anna, with a couple of rocks put on top to keep away any curious kea. At 5.40am we were on our way, relieved to have light packs for the summit attempt, happy to be moving and warming up, and with some nerves and excitement about

what lay ahead. We crossed straight over the frozen lake. In the dark, we began climbing the snow slope leading to the south ridge, which was faintly silhouetted against the horizon. Some way up, we realised we were heading in the wrong direction and had to change tack to get to where we wanted to be. We corrected course and soon arrived at the bottom of our previously-sighted possible way onto the ridge. It was steep.

We got out our half rope and tied in. A token snow stake was placed as an anchor, but we guessed the soft snow would fail to hold it with little more than a solid tug. My main concern, however, was leading this pitch up to the ridge, whether I'd be able to climb it, and whether I'd be able to get any sling runners in on the way up. I remembered I'd had a dream that we had brought a set of tri-cams and I was happy that we had. Unfortunately, it was just a dream and we hadn't. There would have been very limited opportunities to place one anyway, but remembering the dream slightly unnerved me. I started up the face, moving carefully and testing each hold. The snow was soft and didn't provide secure axe placements. But kicking into the soft snow provided pretty good footing, so I carefully made my way up, keeping my weight on my feet. A couple of steps further up, I found scary, exciting moves where my crampon points were on rocks under the snow, and I had to commit and trust them to stay on while stepping up to a higher position. I held my nerve and moved through them. About 15m up, I finally found a good rock to sling and slung it. A couple of times, I came around corners and peered up through my head-torch beam and thought, 'Oh, fuck. Oh, fuck. This doesn't look very good.' I resisted the urge to give in to the fear, and slowly and carefully worked my way up, problem-solving all the way. I found another good sling and this gave me confidence to move through, and soon after I popped up onto the ridge. It was getting light by this time and the view over to the ranges to the east was immense. I felt huge relief and a surge of energy. I threaded a rock for an anchor, put Nick on belay, and waited while he climbed up.

From this point on, we moved together over the top of the ridge with about 40m of rope between us. I stayed in the lead, placing slings as protection where I could. The ridge was narrow and tricky, requiring some delicate traverses and downclimbs. We had just enough slings to make it all the way across to where this narrow ridge intersected with the steeper but much broader ridge leading up to Mt Franklin. Once there we regrouped, re-distributed slings, had a quick drink of water and a muesli bar, and discovered that if we had known, we could have cut out the whole ridge we had just traversed by climbing one short, steep pitch right off the top of the snow slope to the point we were now at. There was a bit of tat hanging there, which we noted for a rap-off point on the descent. We decided to stay roped up and, moving together, we went up the steep slope using snow stakes and slings as the occasional piece of pro. The snow was good and firm here, so travel was fast and easy, and before long we were at the top of the steeper bit and packed the rope away—guessing the rest of the way to the top would be somewhat flatter. From here the going was relatively straightforward, though still very exposed. Careful footing was always required. But the snow was good, the terrain not too steep, and we steadily worked our way up.

As the climber comes over a crest and sees some frost crystal formations sitting on a bank of snow, the maunga lets him know it is a wahine. He doesn't really know how or why he knows that, but he just feels it deep down: she has told him.

The clouds swirl and the two climbers are now up in them. Shades of blue sky are occasionally revealed, but for now they are cut off from the rest of the world on this mountain ridge that seems to exist in its own realm. Just them and this maunga.

Soon we could see the top, and a short climb up a snow gully brought us up to it. We stopped just short of the taumata in order to show our respect to the maunga. We hugged and sat down, elated to have made it to the top, and also physically and mentally exhausted. I had conjured up some doubt early on as to whether we would be able to get through some of the trickier sections.

The cloud envelopes them, not letting them see the view out, but instead focussing their eyes and thoughts inward, to this very moment, this very mountain top, just Nick, Erin, Mt Franklin, and a challenge half-completed. The turning point has arrived. No longer will any thought or consideration of whether to keep going or whether to turn back bother them. There is now only one thing to do, to get back down safely. In one aspect, their minds can now rest, no game-playing about acceptable risk or good decision-making. But on the other side of the coin, their minds now have to be more switched on than ever. Going down is always the most dangerous part. One misstep could cost a life.

We retraced our steps, downclimbing the steeper sections. My crampons kept balling up with snow, and it was infuriating having to knock off the balled-up snow every few steps to avoid loss of traction on the narrow ridge. In my mind, I wrote furious letters to the manufacturer, telling them I expected better from their products and that they were putting my life at risk. I brought my mind back to the present and focussed on my steps. Going down was a lot faster than going up, and before too long we had made it down to the intersection of the ridges, where we planned to rap off. I climbed down to the tat we had spotted and I poked my head into the crack that it protruded from. It turned out to be a piece of prusik cord with knots tied in it, with the knots jammed into the crack, just holding on friction. I laughed and surmised that a Czech person had been there. My Czech friend often tells me about the trad climbing they have there, using only knotted slings for protection. Nick arrived and saw the predicament. I had already hatched a plan to sling a big block further back and extend it with a few of our slings to use as a backup for Nick to abseil on the knotted cord. Nick got on the rope and boldly swung out into the gully, giving the knot a robust test as he rappelled down. I watched the knot moving ever so slightly, but it was jammed in the crack pretty securely. I asked him to give the rope a couple of good bounces with his weight when he was just off the ground, and I was then satisfied it wasn't going anywhere, so I removed our backup and abseiled off the knot. I was very relieved when I got to the ground, and it was nice not to have to leave any more gear on the maunga.


Nick Latty

We walked, ran and glissaded down the snow slope back down to the lake. I glissaded merrily for a while before I realised it was stupid glissading with crampons, so I stopped. We walked back over the lake and down to Hotel Anna, where we repacked our gear. Our plan was to walk back down to our stashed approach shoes and have lunch there, since we were out of water and should be able to get some at the stream further down. It was nice to get the crampons off, but it wasn't so nice to have heavy packs again. Nevertheless, we were in good spirits and it was quick going down, and soon we had left the snow behind. We had some difficulty locating the boulder in which we had stashed our shoes. In fact we walked right past it, but eventually found it, reclaimed our shoes, and walked a bit further down to where the creek was running. It wasn't the freshest-looking water, with visible algae growing in it, but we were going to take what we could get at that point. We made a quick cup of tea and ate our tuna and rice with a boiled egg. We had just a couple of

muesli bars each left for the remainder of the walk out. We felt good about bringing just the right amount of food. It is always a temptation to overpack.

We sidled across the long corner slope leading back to the scree slide, aiming a lot lower this time so as to avoid scree slopes higher up. However, this led to quite a lot of thick scrub-bashing, slipping over, tussock-pulling, and all those kinds of delightful antics. Eventually we did reach the scree slide and descended it, carefully stepping on big rocks, skiing down loose gravel (which Nick excelled at), and at times creeping through the scrub on the edge.

The kea soars over the mountain slopes, watching the two figures below awkwardly scramble, slip and slide their way down the slope. It lands on the side and plays a game with the straggler, pretending to munch on a shrub and then poking its head out for a cheeky peek. It makes the straggler laugh. He seems to be in a hurry though and he continues on his way.

The gurgling river below got ever closer and closer, until finally Nick was down. I came down the last little bit to catch up with him and had a much appreciated drink of water.

We didn't dilly dally, as Nick had family commitments that evening in Christchurch that he was hoping to get back in time for, and we both knew we still had a long slog ahead of us. The track up the river was hard to follow, and at times we found ourselves off it, scrambling up the river bed on boulders to re-find the track. It would dart off into the bush and up narrow root ladders with overhanging trees, which would catch your pack and try to pull you back just for fun. When you are exhausted and tired, this is not so amusing. At one stage I dropped far behind Nick, lost the track, and resigned myself to just walking up the river. I felt frustration and anger. Popping over a boulder, there was Nick with his camera taking a photo of me. It turned out I was actually on the track and there were markers right across the river, which I had missed due to being too caught up in being frustrated and angry. I calmed down. We took turns walking in front. It was interesting psychologically to find that I was more motivated to go fast and set a good pace when I was in front. When I was behind, I felt it was hard work to keep up.

We only stopped for a quick rest at Goat Pass Hut, which was empty again. We stormed through to Mingha Biv, almost running, and then continued on through the bush track, walking as fast as we could as the light slowly faded. I left my head-torch off for as long as I could, letting my eyes adjust and enjoying the challenge of seeing obstacles in the dark. The track out seemed so much longer than it was on the way in. We walked through the bush in the dark for a couple of hours before popping out onto the gravelly river bed of the Mingha. In my mind we were only a kilometre or so from the car, but in reality it was still about four kilometres. We crossed the river a few times. Wet feet didn't matter anymore. We would be going home soon.

The possum walks down to the river to drink. Startled by two humans with bright lights walking around the corner, it scampers up the gravel slope and sits at a safe distance while the humans walk past, looking at it and shining their torches. It doesn't run away. The walkers seem to be hostile. The noises they are making sound nasty. It keeps its guard up and watches carefully as they pass.

The trip ended in the dark and the cold, just as it had started 36 hours earlier. We crossed the Bealey River, walked back alongside the highway, and then crossed it to the carpark. It felt incredible to get those loads off the shoulders and wet boots off the feet. Cleverly, we had beers stashed in the car awaiting our return. Not so cleverly, we had neglected to stash any food. We jumped in the car with the heater on full blast and made our way back into town. Maccas was the only option that late on a Sunday night, but at that point, anything would have done, and the Maccas went down an absolute treat, as did the beers. Nick reckoned it was his 'beer of the year'.

At the moment the two friends arrive back to the house in Lyttleton and walk through the side door, Rūaumoko shifts in the belly of Papatūānuku and the house jolts suddenly with an earthquake. 'Don't forget,' he seems to be saying. 'Don't forget who's boss out here.'

THE BORLAND MEET 2020

BY JACOB DOORNEBOSCH

The Borland valley sits about 30 km south of Manapouri and sports some of New Zealand's best granite climbing outside of the Darrans. Various tranches of development have occurred over time, with a mix of sport and trad lines established at different crags through the valley. The climbing meet organised there for this year was designed to bring climbers together to enjoy climbing around the area, as well as help with a bit of crag development by establishing a number of new routes, improving tracks and removing choss.

At a quick ten-hour drive from Christchurch, this is arguably a weekend trip only for the very keen. Which was us. Driving into the Borland valley at 3am on a Friday night, we were all psyched to check it out after seeing the cover of *The Climber* #91 (autumn, 2015), even if it meant driving past the Darrans (say what?). The flooding to most of Southland and related events like the destruction of the Hollyford Road hadn't quite put us off. After a night on the side of the road dodging weather, we crammed back into the stacked Sentra and followed the power lines through the valley to the crags.

We came across a cardboard sign you could have thumbed a lift with saying 'Climbers', which led us to a luxury tarp setup that'd make any dirtbag jealous. We'd been vaguely following a Facebook event set up to arrange a crowd. It looked promising with a solid number of 'maybe' responses, but by the end of the day a good-sized crowd had shown face. An amalgamation of rescued Homer Hut residents, Southlanders and Cantabrians were quickly fighting for space around the campfire. To celebrate, we even had a keg, subsidised by a locally famous Honda Odyssey that had taken its last breath.

The meet ran over the next week, with six new routes put up along with plenty of repeats of the established routes. A barbecue put on by Peter O'Neill couldn't have been a better way to cap it off and fend off the 'rip-top can diet'.

Sam Stephenson climbing *Old Man Winter* (24), at The Den. BEN GRINDLE

The author on his new route, *White Noise* (26), established at The Den during the climbing meet in February. SAM STEPHENSON

The Borland, while arguably one of the more remote rock climbing areas, really does deserve more attention from climbers. It is a beautifully secluded place to go climbing, with stunning mountain scenery and beech forest only marred by the high tension powerlines running back from the hydro scheme. You could complain about that, but you wouldn't have an access road without them. The potential for climbing here is huge—no matter your preferred discipline—and with more development effort, it could really become a nationally significant climbing destination. I hate to make comparisons, but … it's less effort than trudging up to Moir's Mate, sports a wider grade-range of routes than Little or Big Babylon, and to get to any of those you'll need to drive an extra 100 km just to get stuck behind a tour bus. Sold? Come along to the next meet.

MAIN BLUFF AND EAGLE ROCK:

Routes were established on the Main Bluff as early as the 1990s, with a spurt of development in 2010 and again in the 2014/15 summer. There are about 20–30 routes at last count. The cliffs rise proudly out of the scrub, with a number of trad and mixed lines established and a number of open projects waiting to be climbed. Generally speaking, the rock is quite clean, meaning the scope for more lines is huge here. The approach takes approximately 1–2 hours, depending on your level of fitness and the size of your rack. A standard rack up to #3 will be fine, but you might want to take a couple of doubles under #0.5.

During the meet, a crew went for a three-day stay up at the rock bivvy under the bluff. The bivvy sleeps roughly five people and is at the base of one of the walls. In the rain this will keep you dry, but keep in mind you're subalpine in Fiordland. From this base, Jimmy Finlayson managed to establish a new 45m trad line, *Fearless Fantasies* (21), on the Feature Face wall. Helen Sinclair spent a bit of time at Eagle Rock, managing to tick off the 'Beak' project, a proud off-width, the kind that's 'just impossible to grade'.

THE DEN:

The Den is one of the larger established cragging areas, with a number of sport, trad and mixed routes added in 2014/15. The main wall is on overhung orange rock with quartz streaks. This is the smoothest rock you'll find at any of the established Borland crags. The routes can be a bit sandy with the minimal traffic, but nothing that you'll need more than a chalk brush to clean. Bring your sport rack and some trad gear for the routes on the climbers' left of the crag.

During the meet, Sean Burrows established a punchy new trad line, *Espresso Crack* (20), and Norm climbed his aptly-named *Angry Ginger* (24). Further left, Jimmy Finlayson put up *Overmotional Wobble* (24), a second pitch to the existing route *Old Man Winter* (24), and Jacob Doornebosch climbed *White Noise* (26) through the middle of the wall. At around 35m in length, this route still only gets you halfway up the wall.

Jimmy Finlayson making the first ascent of *Fearless Fantasies* (21) on the Feature Face Wall, Main Bluff. BEN GRINDLE

THE WATCHTOWER:

A number of developers established routes on The Watchtower in 2014/15, and many somewhat surprisingly remain unrepeated. The wall hosts a collection of one-to-three pitch face routes in the 20s on what is a slightly off-vertical face. The wall sits proud from the south side of the valley as a detached grey granite pinnacle, with quartz streaks running the full length. It's only a ten-minute walk from the road and now has a fresh track up to the wall. A sport rack will do fine for most routes, but you'll want a small rack for a couple of them.

During the meet, Simon Bischoff bolted his 'End of the World Party' open project directly up the middle of The Watchtower face, pre-empting the now-inevitable swathe of Coronavirus-themed first ascents. If possible, this will be one of the best face routes on offer in the South Island, and brick hard!

THE ROCK:

The rock is primarily granite, with large quartz dykes running through the walls. Some areas can get a bit dirty after a winter season (it's Fiordland), but generally the rock is unvegetated and requires little cleaning.

If you're into geology, around 12,000 to 13,000 years ago, 27 cubic kilometres of mountain fell from the Hunter Mountains near the Borland Saddle into the tail end of Lake Monowai. It was the largest landslide in known history, and you can check it out from your car.

TOP The proud outcrop of Eagle Rock. SAM STEPHENSON

BOTTOM After a wet start to February in Southland, the campfire at the meet was a good place for Darrans refugees to dry out. BEN GRINDLE

SEASON:

Climbing is possible all year round, depending on the level of snowfall and rain. The Den and the right end of The Watchtower tend to stay dry in light rain. Be aware that the road is generally closed to vehicles (there's a locked gate by Borland Lodge) for winter, sometimes from as early as Easter. It usually opens again around Labour Weekend, but this is weather dependent. For road status, call DOC Fiordland at 03 249 7924 or Borland Lodge at 03 225 5464.

WHERE TO STAY:

The Borland Lodge has accommodation for between $12 and $35, depending on your level of fancy, offering everything from a chalet to camping. Camping is also possible at the Monowai or South Arm campsites, from where it is about a ten-minute drive to the crag each day. Fires are permitted provided there is no fire ban in place, and both sites have an untreated water supply and basic toilet facilities. These are the only facilities along the Borland Rd, so bring the appropriate inventory in order to leave no trace.

GETTING THERE:

Turn west onto Lake Monowai Road from Highway 99, which is either about 35 km south of Manapouri or 45 km north of Tuatapere. Continue past the Lake Monowai turnoff and follow power lines to Borland Lodge. The first cliffs are about 16 km from the SH99 intersection or nine kilometres from Borland Lodge when heading towards Borland Saddle. The different crags are accessed from slightly different points along this road. The gravel road is suitable for most vehicles except campers' caravans.

GUIDE:

Is there one? Not quite, but the majority of routes are logged on ClimbNZ with relatively good topo information. Check it out.

LIFETIME PROJECT

CHRONICLES OF OBSESSION

by **Tom Hoyle**

The routes at Castle Hill don't get a lot of attention compared to the boulders these days. But for those masochists looking for a supreme challenge to their technical climbing ability and the prolonged opportunity to 'enjoy the process', there are a few routes out at Castle Hill that are worthy objects of obsession.

There is a certain climbing maturity in recognising that your greatest challenges won't necessarily come from the routes with the biggest numbers, and that climbing well on a wide variety of route styles, wall angles and rock types is as impressive as finding the highest graded route you can do that plays to your natural strengths.

That was my reward for a 13-year obsession with *Adios Gringos*.

When I first tried the route—at the encouragement of Stefan Hadfield, back in 2005—I thought it was impossible. I could barely do any of the moves, and I split the tip of my index finger right through on one of the tiny, sharp edges low on the route. Despite a prolonged hangdog siege and pulling through complete sections that I had no idea how to climb, I still didn't make it all the way to the anchor. I was a jibbering wreck by the end of it. My fingers were bleeding, and I felt like I'd just had my toes clamped in a vice for an hour. The second day I attempted the route, hoping that the previous session had just been an 'off day', I had exactly the same experience—including the punctured epidermis. Clearly, climbing this route required a level beyond my current climbing game, and I was going to need to become accustomed to failing and trying to learn from those failures.

Now, you may think that 'enjoying the process' and 'learning from failure' is just loser-talk—and you'd be right. If you were Roland Foster and you onsighted *Adios Gringos*, you wouldn't need to enjoy the process. You'd be too busy basking in your own glory as you moved on to the next easy route (though Roland tells me he mucked up the celebrations by trying *Haptic Channels* (26) immediately afterwards and got shut down). Such is life. I once drew a Venn diagram of Roland Foster's climbing achievements and my own. The only significant intersection was the route *Even Dwarfs Started Small* (27, Whanganui Bay), and I can guarantee you that our sequences on that particular route were about as different as you are going to get on the same bit of rock. Roland is strong-fingered, compact and technically proficient (amongst many other strengths). I am weak-fingered, tall and have all the nimble footwork of a Clydesdale (with a shoe size to match).

You might further question, 'Why is this no-hoper on a route that is clearly too hard for him? If he can't climb 25, he should be trying some lower grades and learning how to rock climb.' But even at the time of first trying *Adios*, I had climbed routes several grades harder. So why was this route feeling so impossible? This is what I needed to figure out.

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Over the years following my first attempts in 2005, this is what I learned about my climbing. As a general rule in rock climbing, being heavy results in having a poor power-to-weight ratio. Success on difficult rock climbs is influenced by a wide variety of physical, mental and environmental factors. However, I don't think it is controversial to say that the single most important factor in difficult rock climbing—the attribute that is considered the strongest indicator of aptitude for hard grades—is finger strength-to-weight ratio. At 90kg, this is never going to be in my favour, and I would need some freaky finger strength genetics to climb at anywhere near an elite level. But despite being heavy, I also have a few things that can be considered advantages in climbing, most notably a long reach.

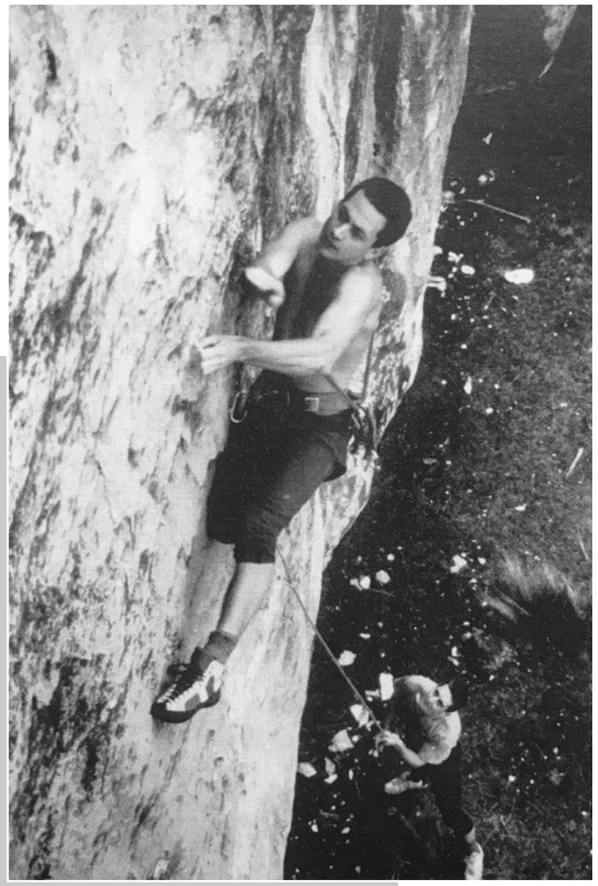
Adios Gringos

For those not familiar, *Adios Gringos* (25) is a route at Castle Hill on the large face of the Quantum Field massif oriented towards Dark Castle. The appearance and scale of the face make it more akin to old-school French limestone than pretty much any other climbing spot in the country, which can be viewed as both a good or a bad thing, depending on your preferences. Nevertheless, the original *Canterbury Rock* guidebook describes this as 'one of New Zealand's best faces'. Despite this quality assessment, neither *Adios Gringos* nor its sister routes *Chocolate-Coated Razorblades* (27) or *Dance of Silence* (29) receive as many ascents as you might think. The once-popular ranking website 8a.nu has only four ascents logged for this route. But I'm told it was much more popular in the early '90s.

Adios Gringos was first climbed in 1989 by Dave Fearnley. Lionel Clay had bolted the line and the neighbouring route *Chocolate-Coated Razorblades*, which shares the same top section. Lionel climbed *Razorblades* before a trip to the Cordillera Blanca, but when he returned he wasn't in the required climbing shape to follow up and also do *Adios*. He offered it up to Dave, who worked out some new foot beta and climbed it. The name *Adios Gringos* emerged as he and Matt Evrard were learning Spanish in preparation for a trip to Patagonia. The grade was given as 24.

Adios Gringos is somewhere around 20m long with seven bolts. The first half of the route is slightly overhanging to vertical, and on this section of the route there are multiple cruxes and the holds are consistently small and often quite sharp. Getting off the ground is likely the hardest move on the route, but it remains consistently technical for the first four bolts of climbing. There is a good rest around halfway, and the remainder of the route is at a lower angle and on mostly immaculate stone.

Despite the second half featuring lower-intensity climbing, this is perhaps the most enjoyable part of the route. The moves are still aesthetic and thought-provoking, but at an angle where you are able to take your time and enjoy every little section of climbing between the more restful stances. Of course if you muck things up, you can still come off at a few points, and if you've climbed through clean from the bottom, there's a bit of pressure not to mess up your ascent and have to come back for another round of boning down on the nasty tins down below. Then—when you are just metres away from the anchor—comes a final crux. Some people say a route is only a classic if it has a crux at the end. It certainly makes for thrilling drama. Without giving anything away, I think it is safe to say that this section of climbing isn't actually super hard, but it is insecure and never feels easy to do. Every time I committed to the sequence, I was worried that I was going to be spat off. But it really is the crowning glory of the route, a set of moves that seems impossible and has a fairly unique solution that isn't like anything else I've done on another rock climb. But maybe I just have a bad sequence.



The photograph of Dave Fearnley on the first ascent of *Adios Gringos* in 1989, as shown in *Canterbury Rock*.
LIONEL CLAY (REPRODUCED COURTESY OF TIM WETHEY)

The edge of the Quantum Field massif. *Adios Gringos* takes a line through the yellow patches of rock on the largest face, just left of centre. TOM HOYLE.

Lynn Hill, an enormously successful climber and barely five feet tall, famously said that 'short climbers must climb, tall climbers just reach', or words to that effect. A logical pedant might argue that to get to the next hold, *all* climbers must reach, but of course, *I'm* not arguing that. What Lynn is getting at is that, if you are short, you are kickstarted on learning the fundamental climbing skill of continually moving your feet higher up the wall so that you can reach a higher point—simply because you have no choice. The taller the climber, the more often they will be able to reach a good hold from a more comfortable stance and thereby avoid having to do any 'climbing'. Introductory years of easy reaching from massive foot ledges on lower-angled routes can give tall climbers lazy and sloppy technique. As routes get steeper and the holds get more consistently small, this shortcut becomes less and less useful, while the likely higher weight of the taller climber gives them a disadvantage in terms of power-to-weight ratio and endurance. Suddenly, the midgets are in charge.

Derek Thatcher, one of my long-suffering climbing mentors, likes to describe climbing technique using the metaphor of a toolbox. The bigger your toolbox, the wider variety of tools you have available for their appropriate use on any problem you might come across. As he put it, I had one tool only and it was one of those comically-oversized spanners you might see in a store that sells industrial rigging and ship supplies. Just apply as much torque as possible using the most generous bits of geometry available.

Applied selectively, this one-trick pony approach can work pretty well. I climbed a couple of grade 24 routes in my first year of rock climbing. In those days, where you learned to climb on rock rather than in the gym, that was pretty good going. But I was far from being a grade 24 climber and my onsight ability was appalling. I could reach or jump from jug to jug, but any route that couldn't be solved this way was mostly beyond me, especially if it required holding a small hold or even standing on one.

Luckily, I have another useful attribute, and that is a deep appreciation for the challenge of rock climbing. I was a naturally-talented athlete as a child, and won running races at national fixtures and played rugby on Eden Park. So on first trying climbing at age 22, I expected to find it easy. Of course, when I didn't, I might have just stuck to the things I was good at. But there were lots of aspects of climbing that I really enjoyed, most notably the freedom of the pursuit, the rich history of climbing culture and the wild places it took you. So I persisted and found I was more and more fascinated with the physical aspect of rock climbing also. The way it appeared to be about brute strength—and yet the best climbers made things look effortless—was unlike anything else I'd tried, and I quickly became obsessed with getting better.

I was soon to discover there were a lot of obstacles to getting better. I am tall, with long limbs—even for my height—but I am also pretty heavy for a rock climber. Long arms are always useful, if possibly at a leverage disadvantage. Long legs are useful too, but require good flexibility to make use of them. My youthful sporting activities and a general propensity for tight muscles meant my flexibility was extremely poor—off the bottom of the scale on the sit-and-reach test poor. Hip turnout is quite vital in climbing, especially at less steep angles, as it allows you to keep your hips and therefore your weight and centre of gravity as close to the wall as possible, which means you don't have to put as much force through your hands. I have really bad turnout, which makes this fundamental technique difficult for me. My best way to get close to the wall is to drop one foot off the wall to better clear the leg and reduce the need for hip turnout. Of course, this makes for a less stable position, more weight through the hands, and it still requires moving my weight far out from the wall in order to make continual foot movements. Combining this with a poor finger strength-to-weight ratio means that climbing on small holds in vertical terrain is considerably challenging. I also suffer from damp, sweaty skin. Adding this swampy hand syndrome with lots of weight leads to a lot of slipping on smooth holds and tearing on sharp holds. *Adios Gringos* was my perfect storm.

Despite these glaring weaknesses, or potentially because of them, I had quickly discovered the inspiring challenge of trying something and thinking it impossible, then applying a problem-solving process to find a solution that fit my physical attributes. The thrill of finding eventual success on something that you remember feeling completely impossible is, in my opinion, one of the richest rewards climbing has to offer and is universal across climbing disciplines.

As you get better at climbing, this feeling can be harder to find. But the resolute face of impossibility was what *Adios Gringos* first presented me, so I knew that I needed to keep trying it and figure it out. Maybe, just maybe, it would be possible to climb it and overcome the impossible.

Of course, I didn't know how long that might take.

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Stefan, who introduced me to the route, took a few days to climb it. He was cruising grade 29s at the time and usually onsighted 25s, so I figured this wasn't an easy one, perhaps especially if you were tall like both Stefan and me. But he informed me the secret was to try it more than once in a day. He'd only ever given it one go on any given day and hadn't 'worked it out properly', so each attempt he was half-remembering the sequence and making things up as he went along. This is a classic rookie error and not something that Stefan would have used as an efficient process on a route with a bigger number. But the route was 'only 25'—so he expected to be able to climb it without a top-tier strategy. The problem was that the route is so long and intricate, with so much time holding and standing on small holds. By the time you got to the anchor, your fingers and toes were telling you in no uncertain terms that it was time to stop this torture. Having a second go was hard to summon enthusiasm for.

After failing on the route so badly on my first few attempts, I tried to use a considered process that would give me the best chance of success. I tried a few different pairs of shoes to see what worked best. I only tried it in good conditions (the wall faces north and gets a lot of sun; even in winter, it is too hot for ideal friction when the climb is in the sun, unless you have a good breeze). I tried individual crux sections over and over to try and refine the sequence as much as possible and make the foot sequence optimal. I even wrote a full beta description for the entire route to help with memorising the sequence. Despite all this, it still took me some time before I was able to have more than one go on any given day.

Same move, different decade. Using full reach at the end of the crux, 2009 and 2018. DEREK THATCHER.

After sporadic attempts into the following year of 2006, I had a sequence for the whole route and was able to start making redpoint attempts. After a few goes flailing on the start move, I'd eventually stick it and fall off at an awkward wrong-footed high-step move by the second bolt. But this was progress. I was slowly feeling more comfortable on the less difficult sections, though clipping the fourth bolt while standing on a couple of greasy smears and holding a small and particularly sharp hold seemed like a bit of a mental block. The insecure feet made me want to hold the hold tighter, but I didn't even really want to hold the hold at all.

To build confidence, I started trying to climb the top half of the route 'clean' (without resting on a bolt) once a session so I'd have it dialled in when I eventually got through the bottom.

As I started to consistently get through the very bottom and climb higher on the route, I began to fail due to fatigue, or 'pump', rather than because a move was too hard or I didn't know how

to do it on link. Unfortunately, because I found so many of the moves hard, I was holding on as tight as I could for a large percentage of the climbing. As a heavy climber with a predominance for fast-twitch muscle fibres, endurance isn't a strength of mine and the 'pump' failure was happening almost comically low on the route. In fact, it was power endurance failure, rather than pump. But I was determined to persist.

As has happened so often in my climbing journey, this determination quickly turned into injury. Warming up for routes in this area is hard. There aren't a bunch of easy jug-hauls to get the blood pumping, and you want it to be cold to put the friction in your favour. The reckless approach of death-crimping until failure again and again in cold conditions quickly manifested as medial epicondylitis, commonly called elbow tendonitis or 'golfer's elbow'. This became worse to the point that I couldn't sleep or would wake up in the night in throbbing pain. I had to put both *Adios Gringos*—and crimping in general—on hold for a while, as I was planning a climbing trip to Europe.

Once back in Christchurch, 18 months later, over the elbow tendonitis (for a brief period at least) and with a thorough education in European limestone climbing, I felt my chances on *Adios Gringos* would be in much better shape than before I left. Maybe I'd make a triumphant return and waltz up it easily. I found my old notes to the sequence and refreshed my memory before giving it another go. I certainly felt slightly more comfortable on that type of technical vertical terrain than a few years prior, but the route still seemed insurmountably difficult. Slightly demoralised, I spent more time bouldering in winter and climbing steep routes at the Cave in the summer, though I would occasionally get back on the route to see how I was going.

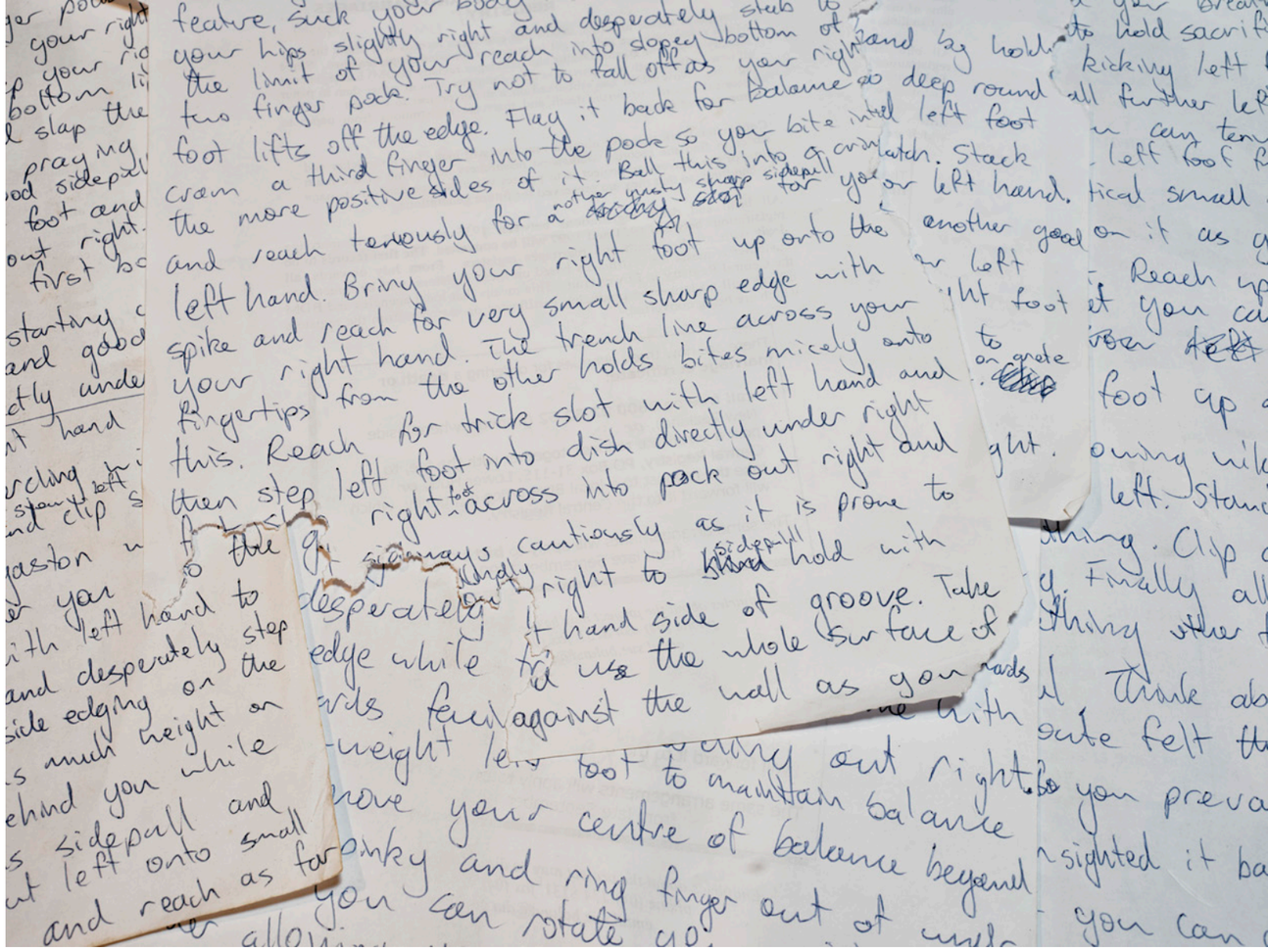
At the end of 2009, I climbed my first 29 at The Cave and was heard to mutter 'I still can't do *Adios Gringos* though' under my breath while people were generously congratulating me. I had another period of attempts the following winter and started getting new high points, giving me some mild optimism. But a change of life circumstances at the end of that winter meant I moved to the North Island and was forced to abandon *Adios Gringos* as a viable project.

During seven years in the North Island, the less consistent climbing access and ongoing injuries (more elbow tendonitis, two serious pulley injuries and persistent shoulder bursitis) gradually eroded my climbing motivation. But I dud receive a further education in technical, vertical climbing on the wonderful cliffs of Whanganui Bay (including climbing Roland's *Even Dwarfs Started Small* with a beefcake sequence that didn't require me to move off the crux two-finger pocket). Fresh mentoring from skilled Wellington climbers John Palmer and Bob Keegan also helped raise my game with new skills and approaches. Despite my lack of natural endurance, I still did better on steeper angles, and I even managed to climb another 29 at the only steep crag around.

When the prospect of a potential move back to Christchurch arose, my enthusiasm for climbing bubbled back to the surface, and it seemed like climbing might once again be the central focus of my life. Despite having spent seven years climbing out of Christchurch previously, and thereby exhausting a lot of what was available, I still had *Adios Gringos* to do. Excitement began to build. I rummaged around in some boxes in the garage and found I hadn't thrown out my original pages of the sequence description—although rodents had chewed at the edges of the pages and made some key parts illegible. Nevertheless, this was fate.

Once back in Christchurch, I upped my training and immediately began to suffer from elbow tendonitis again. But I had trained myself through two pulley injuries by learning to open hand much more and only crimping holds when absolutely necessary. By now I was old and had knee issues too, so bouldering in winter wasn't really an option. The elbow pain was manageable, though, and by the time winter rolled around, I was ready to make *Adios Gringos* my primary climbing focus for the first time. In the past, it had always seemed too hard and too painful to be the main climbing focus, and attempts had only been sporadic. I'd probably only ever tried it two weekends in a row on a couple of occasions around the time I first developed elbow problems. Years of a laissez faire approach hadn't gotten me very far up the route, so it was time to commit.

Attempts began in earnest. My ragged notes were a bit unclear about one part of the foot sequence, but I still remembered all of the route except for two foot moves anyway. Some initial frustration at one of the lower cruxes brought back memories of my original solution, and I quickly had a workable sequence for the climb again. Redpoint attempts were still dependent on the goodwill of a few patient belayers, as route climbing at Castle Hill was even less popular in 2018 than it had been in 2005.



The route still felt hard and for quite a lot of the climbing, but I seemed to have more in reserve now on most of the moves and was able to climb with a more delicate and considered style than in the past. I knew where to hold each hold, when to stack the fingers, where to sprag the thumb. I knew when to chalk-up and when to keep moving. I moved my feet deliberately and precisely. I trusted each foothold completely once engaging the rubber of my shoe (only the stickiest rubber). I didn't hesitate at the clips, and found a relaxed but focused calm at the resting positions. For the first time, I didn't feel like I was flailing or that the route was beyond me.

Soon I was falling on what I had decided was 'the last move you should fall off from'. Eventually I stuck that move and fell off the next, then the next, then the next. Then I climbed through all of those moves and fell off on what I didn't even think was a move, just standing up into the last position before the halfway rest. I knew now that the route was possible. I had climbed it from the rest to the top without falling in all of the previous five or six sessions.

The next time I went out I did a minimal warm-up, hanging on a few random jugs at the bottom of the wall and slowly weighting some small edges in a crimp hand position. I then tied in and climbed to the anchor without falling, putting the draws on as I went. The climb didn't feel hard at any point, just a rehearsed set of movements performed in balance and control. The impossible climb had become a warm up. The feeling of satisfaction at the anchor by far eclipsed what I'd felt when I did my first ever 25, 15 years previously. Despite Stefan's advice, I had only needed one go in the day to get the route done, albeit 13 years later.

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You could say that *Adios Gringos* is a nasty, sharp and sandbagged route, best left alone. I think of it as a climbing education and prefer the description in the original *Canterbury Rock* guidebook: 'A brilliant route that may perplex some punters.' C

ABOVE 'The trench line across your fingertips from the other holds bites nicely into this.' The author's original beta description, complete with histrionic adjectives and rat gnawing. Avert your eyes if you have ambitions for the onsight. TOM HOYLE

PREVIOUS The author climbing Roland Foster's *Even Dwarfs Started Small* (27), Whanganui Bay, in 2016. Tom was unable to do the crux move from the small two-finger pocket, but found a burly undercling and compression sequence instead. JOHN PALMER.

NIBS ROUND ONE WELLINGTON

JUDAH PLESTER

This year's National Indoor Bouldering Series was modified from the usual format due to lockdown restrictions. Rather than running as a series–whereby people are encouraged to travel and attend all events–each event was a standalone competition with no overall series winners awarded. With the Queenstown event postponed until late September, the first round was at Hangdog Gym in Lower Hutt. Despite the strange circumstances, there was a strong turnout and the event was a great success.

Women's results: 1. Kiri Shibahara 2. Sophie Price 3. Phoebe Kenderdine

Men's results: 1. Lans Hansen 2. George Sanders 3. Rob Gajland

NIBS ROUND TWO AUCKLAND

EDDIE FOWKE

The Auckland event, held at the Northern Rocks Gym for the second time, was incredibly popular. Over 120 entrants in just the Open Men's category forced an extra qualification round to be added, keeping organisers and route setters busy throughout the day.

Women's results: 1. Cirrus Tan 2. Amanda Speed 3. Rebecca Hounsell

Men's results: 1. Tom Waldin 2. Alex Kiechle-Cornish 3. Lans Hansen

NIBS ROUND THREE CHRISTCHURCH

TOM HOYLE

Round Three at Uprising in Christchurch had routesetters fretting because what gathered was likely the strongest field of competitors ever seen at a bouldering competition in this country. With nearly 200 entrants in the Open Men's category, this event is massively popular. The generous crowd were witness to a great spectacle to finish, as the Open Men's final was decided by the last competitor needing to flash the last problem to take victory, which he did.

Women's results: 1. Cirrus Tan 2. Erica Gatland 3. Sabrina Butler

Men's results: 1. Wiz Fineron 2. Josh Cornah 3. Matt Corbishley

ENERGY FOLLOWS THOUGHT

YOGA TOOLS FOR CLIMBING PERFORMANCE

BY KESTER BROWN

For me, the concept of yoga always used to be a bit like cleaning behind the oven. You don't want to do it, but you know it's inevitable you'll have to one day, and in the long run you're better off starting now.

As I creak into my 40s and my body falls apart, I feel a sense of duty as an old never-was-been to provide younger climbers with some unsolicited, nagging advice I always wish I'd listened to: save for your retirement, go to the dentist, climb slabs, and do yoga.

To be honest, I was always sceptical of the benefits of yoga beyond stretching. But while my introduction to yoga was motivated solely by a desperate hope to ease aching body imbalances and the injuries they caused, I've since discovered there is more to it than that—there are other aspects of regular yoga practice that can benefit your climbing, which are perhaps lesser known to climbers.

Like climbing, yoga is skill in action. Unlike my preconceptions of yoga, it's not 'just stretching'. It's easy to focus on the physical elements of strength and flexibility when aiming to improve climbing performance, and yoga will definitely help with those aspects. But I want to talk about how yoga can help you with focus.

Of course, yoga isn't the only way to learn focussing techniques, but it provides a very practical pathway to developing tools that are directly transferable to climbing, and the common paradigm of learning yoga through structured classes is really useful in asserting self-discipline into your learning. Intent to practise the more nuanced elements of climbing performance, like focus skills, is too easily overlooked in regular climbing sessions. I don't know about you, but I mostly fit climbing in between other life commitments, and my climbing sessions usually involve a lot of socialising, banter, psyche and loud music, all packed into a couple of rushed hours. The only times I've been able to find the space to employ a more meditative approach to the cerebral challenges of climbing is on extended trips away, which for most of us make up a relatively small percentage of our climbing time.

Effective focus requires intent. You have to work on it, and apply your learned techniques with purpose—yoga provides a very efficient framework for achieving this.

Yoga gives you skills to perform with mindfulness. It provides tools to deal with uncomfortable situations. Climbing is full of uncomfortable situations—most often grounded in either fear or fatigue. These elements of fear and fatigue are usually the in-action stimuli that lead to a distracted mind in climbing. It's possible to largely avoid discomfort in climbing, but in doing so you miss out on some of the richest experiences our sport has to offer.

For climbing, I categorise in-action focus into two categories: single-point concentrated focus, and concentration endurance or 'flow-state' focus.

SINGLE-POINT CONCENTRATED FOCUS

Digging deeper than you thought you could and punching it to the chains or keeping your head together on a necky lead are for sure some of the most satisfying experiences the world of sports has to offer. These achievements rely on an ability to overcome the distractions of fatigue and fear. The limb of yoga that teaches you how to achieve single-point concentrated focus is called dharana. An example of dharana is the practice of drishti, which is a gazing technique used in yoga that develops concentrated intention. Where your eyes go, your mind follows; controlling your gaze helps you control your mind. Drishti is a simple exercise in using a point of focus for your eyes to still your mind, draw your focus inward and build awareness of your body in space.

This focussing technique is effective in providing clarity during high-stress situations, such as recovering at a resting stance during a redpoint, or placing gear in a difficult position. It's also useful as a preparation tool that can be employed in the moments before you step off the ground for an attempt on a challenging climb.

CONCENTRATION ENDURANCE

Quality climbing experiences are usually achieved from an appropriate application of challenge for an associated skill level. If a climb is too easy, you're liable to find it boring. It it's too hard, you'll likely end up feeling stressed or frustrated. An optimal application of stress and challenge can help achieve what is often termed a 'flow state', that is, an intrinsic state of optimal motivation.

Yoga can help in reframing climbing experiences that do not naturally offer the ideal balance of stress (anxiety) and physical challenge for you. Another central principle of yoga is pranayama. There are many different techniques involved, but put simply, it is the practice of controlling the breath. Often during a yoga practice, you will synchronise your breath with movement, which focusses energy and fosters vitality—practising this kind of concentration endurance while on easy climbs increases the challenge, thus inducing a higher level of engagement and allowing an opportunity for that flow-state experience; it also helps you prepare for employing this breath-based focus technique on harder climbs, which is when you'll be able to use it to help process fear and/or fatigue, reducing stress and so, once again, rebalancing the experience and helping achieve that flow-state experience.

An inward focus of the mind achieved through yogic focussing techniques can also contribute to increased proprioceptive awareness, that is, where your body is in space—another benefit for in-action climbing situations.

Yoga can help you in rest and preparation for climbing too. Broadly, yoga is a well-being tool for life. Yoga practice cultivates a positive outlook and contributes to living with ease and in peace. Resting well is an important skill in climbing, and quietening your mind will help rejuvenate you during rest so you can arrive at your next climbing session focussed and ready to attack.

UPRISING

BEFORE EVEREST

Directed by Richard Riddiford.
Reviewed by C. Brian Smith

IN 1951, Earle Riddiford organised the first-ever New Zealand expedition to the Himalaya. The party comprised Riddiford, Ed Hillary, Ed Cotter and George Lowe. Despite no Himalayan experience, ill health, and limited funds, by sheer determination Riddiford, Cotter, and Sherpa Pasang Dawa Lama succeeded in climbing Mukut Parbat (7242m) in the Indian Garhwal.

Mukut Parbat was a significant achievement. News flashed back to New Zealand, and before the party had left India, at Ranikhet, a telegram invited two of the team to join Eric Shipton's Everest reconnaissance expedition, already in Nepal.

Unfortunately, as Shipton was later to rue, the telegram did not specify which two. An acrimonious discussion ensued over who should go, the outcome of which was that Riddiford and Hillary headed for Nepal; Cotter and Lowe headed home. And the rest, as they say, is history—but not quite.

In his last book, *View from the Summit*, Hillary made the comment: 'I respected Earle's dogged determination, but I can't say that I actually liked him—none of us did. On no occasion did I share a climbing rope with Earle and I had no wish to do so. But when it came to organising things, we got on reasonably well together. He had his particular skills and I had mine.' Hillary had not made such comments in earlier autobiographies. One of Riddiford's daughters, Anna, chanced upon these remarks, was incensed, and began what became a 20-year odyssey of discovery as to what prompted them. It culminated in a journey to India to see the mountain itself (from a safe distance) and to make this film.

Riddiford was one of New Zealand's leading post-war pioneering mountaineers. He was ambitious, determined, widely-read, and the architect of many adventurous trips, including first ascents of the South Ridge of Sefton, Tasman from the Balfour, the Maximilian Ridge of Elie de Beaumont, and the East Face of Malte Brun.

Riddiford's companions were often Bill Beaven, Norm Hardie and Jim McFarlane, but it was Riddiford who provided the impetus, gathered the information, chose the objectives, and organised the food and equipment. With this experience and drive, it was natural that he would aspire to climb in the Himalaya.

On Shipton's reconnaissance expedition, Riddiford and Hillary played a major role in forcing a route through the Khumbu icefall to the Western Cwm. Shipton's next venture, in 1952, was Cho Oyo, close to Everest (the Swiss had sole permission for Everest that year.) For this large expedition, Riddiford, who had travelled to England with the British team, undertook most of the organisation, something at which Shipton had never excelled.

Riddiford, Hillary and Lowe participated in the expedition, but for Riddiford it was a substantial disappointment. The party was unsuccessful in reaching the summit, and Riddiford felt he had been assigned only minor roles. He injured his back and, after returning to New Zealand, spent time in hospital recovering.

John Hunt replaced Shipton as leader of the forthcoming 1953 Everest attempt, and despite his inclination for an all-British team, Hillary and Lowe were included. Given their well-honed ice-climbing skills, it is moot whether Hunt's team would have otherwise succeeded.

The film's prime focus is the argument at Ranikhet, which over the years has become almost legendary. In his obituary of Riddiford, Beaven claims that it was a happy team that left New Zealand, but that Lowe soured the relationships permanently when expressing his disappointment at being excluded from Shipton's reconnaissance. Hillary, on the other hand, acknowledges the acrimony, but plays down the event, writing rather glibly that the decision just came down to money: he and Riddiford had some, Lowe and Cotter had run out.

Seeking to expose what actually happened and the basis for Hillary's remarks, Riddiford's surviving climbing companions, Lowe and Cotter, were interviewed for the film. But they remained tight-lipped, obviously not wanting to disturb sleeping dogs, and so—with no new information—the issue that triggered the making of the film remained largely unresolved.

Alpine historian Graham Langton considers that Riddiford and Hillary, both fiercely determined, were simply too alike not to clash, and it's not hard to find instances that would have strained the relationship. For example, on learning of Riddiford and Cotter's success on Mukut Parbat, Hillary and Lowe would have been galled by their decision to turn back, especially as it was influenced by Riddiford's slowness and perceived resistance to letting the stronger pair take the lead. Also, Hillary would have been irked by Riddiford's behaviour on Shipton's reconnaissance; at one point, they almost came to blows. Hillary claims that Riddiford was cool towards Shipton—whereas he found an immediate empathy—and Beaven says that Riddiford 'probably expressed himself too forcibly' over expedition decisions. Perhaps this was why Riddiford was given only lesser roles on Cho Oyo.

In any event, Hillary's remarks, 50 years after the event, seem less than incendiary, and based on his narrative it's not wholly surprising that Riddiford got off-side with his companions. What is surprising is that Anna should have reacted so strongly, as in the film both she and her brother Richard admit that they too did not like their own father (although they do not explain why). Nor does Hillary's comment about not climbing with Riddiford seem totally out of court; as one's life may depend on it, climbers may be forgiven for being a bit particular over who they rope up with.

The film moves on to Riddiford himself, but gives only fleeting glimpses. There are flashes of photographs taken on his New Zealand trips, but few of the peaks are identified and the scale of his exploits is not revealed. The Maximilian Ridge trip—not repeated until the late 1970s—was a shakedown for the forth-coming Himalayan venture, but is poorly illustrated; a good aerial view of the ridge would have been more useful than those of cars crossing the Crown Range.

The film exemplifies Riddiford's considerable organising skills by describing the (very real) difficulties of actually getting the expedition underway in the face of the 1951 watersiders' strike—it was on the last ship out. But there is no reference whatever to his critical contribution to organising the Cho Oyo expedition.

The search for the source of Hillary's remarks and the brief coverage of Riddiford's achievements are interwoven by a commentary on whether or not to make the film, how to make it, and what to do next, as the siblings delve into their father's mountaineering career, none of which had been of any interest to them prior to discovering Hillary's comments. Some of this is distracting, especially the inclusion (and noise) of road trips to places of no obvious relevance.

There is no doubt—as is emphasised throughout the film—that Riddiford's expedition was critical to Hillary's subsequent success on Everest, albeit incidentally. And it has long rankled mountaineering circles that Hillary never credited Riddiford with the pivotal role he played. Tom Scott implies that recognising others' contributions was not much in Hillary's makeup. This film, or a shortened version, could have celebrated to great effect Riddiford's considerable achievements, not just on Mukut Parbat, but throughout his entire mountaineering career. Unfortunately, by focusing on an octogenarian's incautious recollections, it became an opportunity lost.

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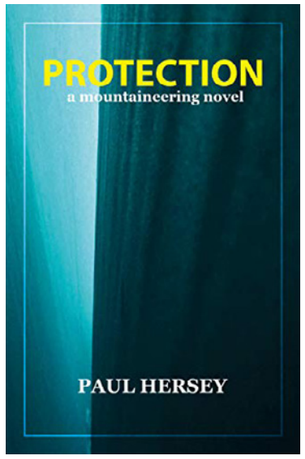
PROTECTION

by Paul Hersey
Reviewed by Lindsay Smith



WHAT STORIES from your family history do you share with your brother's teenage granddaughter and what truths are too painful or too private for her to hear because 'knowing the truth is no protection against it'? Readers coming to prolific mountain writer Paul Hersey's first route into fiction may be wondering if this is another climbing book, a good yarn or something completely unexpected, and the answer is: it's all three. This is a story of 'love and loss' where the New Zealand mountains are the stage on which a family's legacies and tragedies unfold and resolve.

The opening of the book feels comfortable to me as an elderly climber who has often dithered between trying to pass on my passion for climbing, and doing what I can to give teenagers the protection they need from the potential consequences of their excess enthusiasm. And this is the challenge for long-time climber Jase, who is being twisted round the finger of his brother's 15-year-old granddaughter Zoe in an attempt to get him to share the stories of exploits in the mountains.

As the youngest, non-climbing member of generations of climbers, she's keen to hear him give yet another rendition of the great climbs and events which have become the legends that shape their family's history. But as the story unfolds, we begin to understand that his reluctance to give her the details she craves comes from the need to protect her from the truth, rather than from his concern at the potential dangers of the mountains.

Along with Zoe, we first get to hear the easy-to-tell stories—Jase's first sight of a kea and his meeting Zoe's grandmother before Jason shares the more troubling tale of his parents' separation and his move from the plains of New Zealand's east coast to the wild seas and dripping bush of the West Coast. Throughout *Protection*, Hersey's obvious love of sea, bush and high places is woven into every page of the book, adding a powerful theme of 'New Zealandness', which could only come from an author whose knowledge of our flora and fauna was built on years of personal experience and observation.

Recounting the events of a pig-hunting trip which has become family folklore, Jase lets us see hints of what will drive the tale to come; his lack of self-confidence, his mixed feelings for Zoe's granddad, his older, more talented brother, and the emotional weightlessness which came from his first experience of extreme exposure sitting on a rock ledge high above the bush.

Snuggled in her beanbag, Zoe hears each of these family legends one by one as Jase works his way towards the book's apparent crux: what really happened to his brother and their mate when they attempted to create a legacy for the family with a first ascent of Maunga ō Hine. While explaining the crux to Zoe, Jason gives the reader the crux of the book; features unseen from a distance can unlock a puzzle when you know where to look.

Describing the epic on The Buttress, Paul uses his skill as a story teller, balanced with his own knowledge of pushing the limits on big walls, to take the reader along for the climb as if we were there. It is the description of the mundane details underpinning this and each of the family's legends which make them real for us.

With no need to resort to *Vertical Limit*-type hyperbole, Hersey has created a much more powerful and gripping story for climbing readers. From the route-finding discussions heading in to the base of the climb, through worries over the fitness of the mate, to precautions needed to hide gear from the ever-present keas, the preparations for the climb will seem familiar to many.

The trio's actual climb of Maunga ō Hine will also feel familiar to some climbers, as the holes in the Swiss cheese start to align. But Jason's story is no more about climbing than *Game of Thrones* is about thrones. It becomes apparent that the crux of the book is not the legend of the climb on The Buttress of Maunga ō Hine but, like all climbing cruxes, this is the key to unlock the true summit—the truth which Zoe needs protection from. Or is the real fear, which he's trying to avoid, his reluctance to accept that it's not Zoe who needs protection from the truth.

In 'A Few Words' at the end of the novel, Hersey gives us a glimpse of the influences which created this book: a childhood spent hunting with his father and his mother's encouragement to embrace nature and adventuring with his brothers, friends and partner Shelley. He also acknowledges how the joy of those experiences has been tempered with climbing losses and his struggle to deal with those as best he can. These are the themes which form the framework for *Protection*, and on which he has been able to craft a very readable and engaging story which takes us deep into the New Zealand bush, high onto its mountains and beneath the passions and folklore of one family.

Perhaps, the book's appeal is best described in Hersey's own dedication to those of us who share his love of adventures. 'Here's to slogging uphill with heavy packs, cold bivouacs beneath the stars, nervous alpine starts, and those knife-in-the-chest cruxes right when you least expect them.'

***Protection* by Paul Hersey, Otago Publishing, $24.95**

BETA DESIGNS BETA STICK EVO STICK CLIP

AS SOMEONE who primarily self-describes as an 'alpinist', stick clips are slightly conflicting for me. I like the safety margin they provide, but the typical painter's pole has always seemed too cumbersome for me to really be interested in carrying one around. However, with Covid, I've been sport climbing close to home more often and a stick clip is awfully handy for avoiding the danger of the first few metres until you can get the first quickdraw on.

There are a few competing designs—the wire frame design and the plastic-cradle design, and the extendable vs non-extendable stick. I settled on the Beta Designs Beta Stick Evo Compact. This second generation of the Beta Stick is a collapsing stick clip that has seven sections, separated by burly flick-lock style adjustment tabs. It collapses down to a measly 55 cm and extends to 2.4m. The meat of the device is a multi-purpose plastic cradle/hook with an adjustable wire-gate catch.

The detractors of this device will complain that it's unsteady when fully extended—this is true. As a telescoping pole, the distal end will be a lot narrower than the proximal end. With the weight of a quickdraw and the hanging portion of the rope at the end of a long lever arm, there is a bit of waving around that will happen. But it's not a big deal. Stabilise it against the rock and clip the bolt.

The other main complaint I hear is that it's not very durable. I've been using it for many months and all is well. I think much of this criticism is a holdover from the first generation (not tested), which does not ring true for the Evo.

This thing clips bolts as well as any other stick clip out there, but it has a whole bunch of other nifty tricks. You can also place a rope in a fixed piece of gear, pull a rope through quickdraws and, with a medium amount of fuss, even remove quickdraws. If you want to utilise these other tricks, however, I would strongly recommend watching some YouTube videos and practise as there is a bit of a learning curve, especially for unclipping quickdraws. It's not 'easy', but it does work. The carabiner hole is another feature that's really nice, meaning you can clip the device to your harness for clipping your way up something that is too hard for you. The plastic 'cradle' holds carabiners securely and the adjustable gate catch seems to fit all of the carabiners I have (a wide variety) very well. If, for some reason, your carabiners don't fit (hard to imagine), there is even a different-sized gate catch you can purchase separately.

I wish I'd purchased the standard size—it's just a little longer (74 cm) when collapsed and a lot longer (387 cm) when extended, but overall I'm very pleased. The Beta Stick Evo is the best stick clip I've used: super compact, light, and it doesn't leave you wandering around the crags looking like you've stolen Gandalf's staff.

★★★★½

Beta Designs Beta Stick Evo. RRP US$75

–Graham Johnson

BLACK DIAMOND WHIPPET HYBRID SKI POLE

BLACK DIAMOND'S Whippet—a hybrid ice axe and ski pole—has been around for many years. I'd always dismissed it as some kind of funky skier-only tool with very limited application. While other companies make something similar—Grivel's Condor comes to mind—the Black Diamond offering always looked the most dialed-in.

My desire to slog up big peaks has recently diminished, but my desire to ski big peaks has increased. I found myself wanting one of these niche instruments for my steeper skiing endeavours. Black Diamond's current Whippet consists of either a standard three-section aluminium pole, a two-section aluminium pole, or a two section carbon/aluminium pole, with a fully removable ice axe attachment on top—the 'Whippet'. I purchased the three-section version, as it seemed like the best balance of both usability and compactness. I didn't really see the point of the carbon fibre version—at only 9g lighter than the three-section aluminium version, it is significantly more expensive and not nearly as compact. Unlike previous generations of Whippets or similar offerings from other manufacturers, the fully-removable Whippet head (introduced in 2018) makes it possible to use the pole for normal trekking/ski pole activities and only attach the ice axe portion when you need it, thus saving weight—and possibly your leg, if you are a clumsy sort.

In practice, the ski pole is typical Black Diamond—nice and secure flick-lock adjustment and good swing weight when you're skiing with it. The handle isn't the most ergonomic, but it does the job and has a nice little lip on it for flipping your heel risers up on your bindings. There is a little ring in the top section for added comfort when choking up on the shaft while traversing. The Whippet itself is easy to attach via a threaded screw mechanism and feels very secure. There is a rubber plug that you can place in the Whippet hole to prevent junk from getting into it when in normal pole mode, but I'm always afraid of losing it in the snow—so I just leave it at home. It also comes with a pick protector that you can install for extra protection. The three-section pole collapses down to a very respectable 64 cm—the same as my other Black Diamond three-section poles (14-year-old Expedition 3s).

I've found the Whippet great for extra security when daggering up steep snow slopes, or skiing steep terrain on hard snow where a slip might turn into a slide unless stopped quickly. I've even swung it over my head like an ice tool to get over a particularly icy bit.

I've found if I'm heading out for a tour and I'm not sure where I'll end up, I just throw the Whippet head in my pack and put it on if needed. If not, I just ski with one regular pole and the Whippet pole. It sits down there in the pack with my ski crampons—bits of equipment you probably won't need, but would be damn glad to have with you in case you do. I'd even take it on a moderate summer snow-marching trip instead of a proper ice axe.

The only thing really annoying about the Whippet is not even product-related. It's that unless you buy two Whippets, it's hard to get a matched set of poles. Black Diamond does sell a line of 'Whippet-ready' poles (demarcated by a 'WR' in the product name) which have the attachment system for the Whippet, but they do not sell a three-section WR pole, only the two-section. These WR poles are also sold as a set of two, so you'll always end up with one more pole than you need. You could buy two Whippets, but I'm of the opinion that if you think you'll need two Whippets, the terrain is probably serious enough that you'll be better off with a real ice axe. An 'Alpine Whippet' attachment is also available—this is a Whippet head shaped like an adze instead of the pick—for more purchase in softer conditions. I think the regular Whippet is just fine.

If you find yourself wanting a niche tool like a ski pole/ice axe, I think the three-section Whippet is the best option out there.

Black Diamond Whippet. RRP $230 (carbon)

★★★★½

–Graham Johnson

WILD COUNTRY PROTON QUICKDRAWS

THERE ARE so many great quickdraws on the market these days. It can be a bit overwhelming, but the best sport draws still seem to be those made to a similar design philosophy as the Petzl classics. Petzl's Spirit or Djinn Access quickdraws have become such benchmark products that many seasoned climbers think you need some really good reasons for buying any other type of quickdraw. So, it took some faith for me to purchase a full set of Wild Country's top-of-the-range quickdraw: the Proton. They come in three sling lengths: 12, 17 and 25 cm. I have been testing the 12 and 17 for about six months now and, spoiler alert, I'm very pleased.

The Protons come with typical, solid-gate carabiners—one straight with a slightly textured gate, and one with a radically curved gate. This style of curved gate seems to be becoming more popular, with a number of carabiners on the market using it—including DMM's Alpha Sport and Climbing Technology's Nimble. The design makes the gate open with more of a downward force than inward, making it superbly easy to clip the rope in. Some other reviewers have commented that the gate tension on the Proton is higher than they desired. I haven't noticed this—I find the gate tension to be very smooth and snappy without being too soft.

The shape of the carabiners themselves is satisfyingly ergonomic. Almost any way you hold them, they nestle securely into the hand. The very deep bolt 'seat' in the upper carabiner sometimes makes it a little difficult to wiggle it onto the hanger when stick clipping, but it's a non-issue when clipping during climbing. The burly nylon draw is easy to grab (not that I ever actually do that...) and the rubber gasket to keep the rope 'biner-oriented is very secure. I've been using other Wild Country draws (Astro, reviewed in issue #79, autumn 2012) for many years with a similar but smaller gasket with zero issues.

Variable-width dog-bones are the current trend in quickdraws. Essentially, the same piece of webbing is wider in the middle than it is at the ends. This makes it easier to grab (in the middle), and the narrower sling point at the biner concentrates the force of a fall more along the spine of the carabiner, which is the strongest part. The dog-bones here are just fine. They're relatively easy to hang onto and the slight taper at the ends is a nice touch.

At 112g, these are not the lightest draws, but that's not why you purchase sport draws. You purchase sport draws for bolt-clipping prowess, and that task these do with aplomb. I would rank these among the top sport draws I've ever used. They're certainly worth consideration if you're in the market.

Wild Country Proton. RRP $50

★★★★

–Graham Johnson


Tom Hoyle

ALL THOSE NORTH RIDGES: Some Thoughts On Route Names

BY RICHARD THOMSON

When we are very young, the human brain has an immense and almost fantastic capacity for differentiation. Small children are easily able to distinguish among all the different sheep in a paddock. That's a more useful skill in other contexts—recognising your climbing partner among all the day walkers at Castle Hill, say, or being able to tell which John Palmer sit-start boulder problem at Turakirae Head is which. It's no offence to observe that for most people (even most climbers) one sit start looks much like another. The point is to illustrate the almost constant process our minds are engaged in of simultaneously classifying and individualising.

Route names are one way to streamline this mental work. But they are less important than you might think. People had been climbing boulder problems at Baring Head for roughly half a century before anyone thought it might actually be necessary to name them all. I confess, it was my idea and there were two reasons for it. First, there was a new guidebook, *Rock Deluxe North*, and every other route or boulder problem in that book had a name. Consistency is almost always a good idea. Second, the main purpose of that guide, as far as I knew, was that it would orient climbers making their first visits to the crags it described. In that respect it was quite different from earlier guides to Baring Head, which fulfilled the radically different function of eking out the returns for those of us unfortunate enough to have to do most of our rock climbing in Wellington. Thus, in those previous guides, distinguishing among individual holds was as important, if not more so, as identifying the routes, which were generally already well known by virtue of direct engagement.

The naming of holds is not unknown, particularly indoors on bouldering walls such as that vestige of hard bouldering in New Zealand, the Engine Room. Curiously, even these guidebooks—compiled to cater to obsessive-compulsive middle-aged white men marooned in Wellington on the public purse—did not discover any need to name the holds. It turns out that numbers and letters are perfectly adequate for the task.

Such a minimalist approach to identification has a long history. Look no further than all those north ridges, south-east couloirs and Mt Miserys scattered over the Southern Alps. There, the advancing web of climbing routes on the rock and ice faces was at first managed simply with surnames: the Jones route, the Jones-Jones, the Jones-Dingle, the Dingle-Button … well, you can see why that solution may have had self-limiting appeal.

All the same, it's pretty clear that, once you've been to the crag a few times or obtained more than glancing familiarity with whatever part of the mountains it is you're heading for, names lose a good deal of whatever importance they have for the basic purpose of figuring out where to go. It's more useful, in many ways, to understand what's meant by 'that route with the razor-sharp left-hand crimp past the second bolt' or 'the John Allen offwidth no one's yet summoned the confidence to even try to repeat'.

This is not to claim route names don't have a purpose. To be sure they do, but you have to look elsewhere to figure out what this purpose might be.

The seesaw game that shifts between distinguishing difference and classifying similarity turns out to be crucial to understanding what names are for. Like so many other aspects of climbing, the rock and the rubble and the snow and the ice do a deal of impassive work just absorbing the rules of the game. Perhaps a bit like how the oceans are busy absorbing CO^2 but never seem to change.

It's likely no accident that the practice of naming routes really hit its stride around the time climbers began to view themselves as renegades, countercultural warriors, hippies and other assorted misfits and oddballs alienated from the mainstream. The route that really broke through into mainstream awareness of climbing then—it was November 1970—was the first ascent of the Caroline Face on Aoraki. Here, though, the route was given a name—*The Clit Route*—that appears not to have been adopted with enthusiasm when newspapers reported the ascent at the time. Or even many years later, such as when in 2014 the *Dominion Post* resurrected this 'triumph for the hippies'. What is more interesting, possibly, is that if you look through the *New Zealand Alpine Journal* (past issues now helpfully archived online at www.nzaj-archive.nz) the only reference to *The Clit Route* is in an article on bouldering.

Leaving aside, for the time being, speculation as to the specific intention behind the name ('unmistakably raunchy' said *Newshub* in 2018) choosing a name that could not or would not be repeated was in itself a minor triumph of differentiation.

Whether understood as defining a separate identity or creating a shared coherence, this is one of the primary purposes of naming. From *The Lord of the Rings* at Mangatepopo, through Lewis Carroll at Mt Eden Quarry, UK post-punk at Whanganui and big-beat electronica at the Wall of Sound, route names create communities by leaving signposts of identity. It's always been this way. Climbing route names are a subset of a much larger, more ubiquitous activity. Christchurch, Nelson, Wellington, Egmont, Franz Joseph, Élie de Beaumont and so forth—all names that leave an oleaginous and just slightly craven taint to the task of reproducing a culture.

What seems to one person to be creating a connection, looks to another to do the exact opposite. Naming, it has long been pointed out, is also a process of taking ownership. Naming is not always political, but it can be ferociously so. Taranaki was once anathema to a Pākehā community raised under Mt Egmont. It's been a long game, but on the whole, it seems Captain Cook's obligation to the earl of Egmont (and lord of the admiralty) has run back out into the seas that first brought him here. Names, like possessions, are perfectly capable of being shared. In fact, when it comes to names, sharing is more or less the entire point. Climbers have a convention that whoever gets there first gets to choose, but there seems no real reason, beyond after the fact justification, for why things should be this way. On the other hand, whether the Hillary Ridge will stick remains to be seen.

When those Whanganui route names were described in the *NZAJ* as having gained their inspiration from 'cult music', maybe they had a point. This was, after all, back when there were only 12 rock climbers in the North Island. But there is a difference between belonging to a group almost no one else is remotely interested in joining, and where we have got to now, when climbers throng the gyms and then go home to eat pizza and watch Moonboard clips on Youtube.

Names bring us together and keep us apart and that will continue for a very long time to come. If you are thinking of naming a route, my advice is to be kind and not to take yourself too seriously.

Some terrible names do stick in the mind. In probably the first Australian climbing magazine I ever read, there was a note recording a new route in the Glasshouse Mountains in Queensland. Its name? *Masturbating on the Spear of Destiny*. It makes no sense, but then again, somehow, it does.


LEE HOWELL/ UPRISING

Use your NZAC membership to get discounts at the following indoor climbing walls:

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Extreme Edge West Auckland

10% discount to NZAC members.

Admission: with own gear - $17 Adult, $12 child. Students 10% discount with ID. 1,3,6 and 12 month memberships available. Courses available. Climbing gear for hire or purchase. Address: 5A Waikaukau Road, Glen Eden, Auckland.

Ph: +64 09 818 3038. www.extremeedge.co.nz/glen-eden

Extreme Edge Indoor Climbing Panmure

10% discount to NZAC members. Admission $16 Adult, $10 child with own gear. 1,3,6 and 12 month memberships available. Courses available. Climbing gear for hire, or purchase. Address: 40 Morrin Road, Panmure, Auckland. Ph: +64 (0)9 574 5677.

www.extremeedge.co.nz/panmure

Birkenhead Pool and Leisure Centre

$11 entry to NZAC members.

Admission: $14 adult, $11 children. Bouldering $7.50. Instruction and gear hire available - harness $5, shoes $4.50, chalk-bag $5. Address: 46 Mahara Ave, Birkenhead, Auckland.

Ph: +64 (0)9 484 7290. www.aucklandleisure.co.nz

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Admission: $18 adult, $15.75 youth under 16, $9 child under 8. Address: Unit 17, 101-111 Diana Drive, Wairau Valley, Auckland.

Ph: +64 (0) 9 278 2363 Climbing shoes for hire, membership options, coaching and classes. Fitness gym, pro shop, yoga.

www.northernrocks.co.nz

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www.rockup.co.nz

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25% discount to members ($15 adult entry).

Admission: Adult $20, child $15 (15 or younger).

Ph: +64 (0)7 3866 558. www.turangiclimbing.com

Wellington

Fergs Kayaks Wellington

NZAC club night and discount to members.

NZAC Club Night Mondays ($12 entry/$2 harness), or $15 any other time. Admission: Adult $23, student $18, child $17 (less $3 if you have your own harness).

Address: Shed 6 Queens Wharf, Wellington.

Ph: +64 (0)4 4998 898. www.fergskayaks.co.nz

Hangdog Indoor Rock Climbing

NZAC members $15 and 20% discount off gear at the shop.

Admission: adult $22, student $18, child $18 (with harness/2hr pass and supervised safety briefing if needed). It is $4 cheaper if you supply your own harness. Gear Hire/instruction available.

Address: Unit #11 - 453 Hutt Rd, Alicetown, Lower Hutt.

Ph: +64 (0)4 589 9181 www.hangdog.co.nz

Canterbury

YMCA Adventure Centre

NZAC members: $16 adult, $12 under 16's,

Club night Tuesday: $12 adult entry with valid membership card

Address: cnr Waltham Road & Byron Street, Christchurch.

Ph: +64 (0)3 377 3000 www.ymcachch.org.nz/fitness-and-climbing/adventurecentre/climbingwall/

Uprising Boulder Gym Christchurch

NZAC Members with I.D. $16 entry. Unlimited entry $19 per week. Admission: $18 adult, $16 student, $14 under 13.

Address: 199 Ferry Road, Waltam, Christchurch.

Ph: +64 (0)3 389 5061 www.bouldering.co.nz

Otago

Waitaki Recreation Centre

NZAC discount on memberships and casual entry .

Annual pass: Adult $120 (NZAC $90), junior $85 (NZAC $65), family $165 (NZAC $125). Casual per day: Adult $12 (NZAC $10), junior $8.50 (NZAC $6.50), family $16.50 (NZAC $12).

10% discount to school kids as a group if paid in full. Other groups to pay gym hire and instructor, plus gear $30 per group.

Address: 43 Orwell Street, Oamaru. Ph: +64 (0)3 434 6932.

www.sportsground.co.nz/waitakicrc/112878

Basecamp Wanaka Climbing Centre

Admission: NZAC members $13.50 Address: 50 Cardrona Valley Road, Wanaka. Ph: +64 (0)3 443 1110.

www.basecampadventures.co.nz

Basecamp Adventures Queenstown

NZAC members $22 Admission: $25 Adult.

Address: 3/15 Red Oaks Drive, Frankton. Ph: +64 (0)3 443 1110.

www.basecampadventures.co.nz

Southland

YMCA Climbing Wall Invercargill

NZAC members with I.D. $5 entry. Admission: $6, free to YMCA members. Address: 77 Tay Street, Invercargill. Ph: +64 (0)3 218 2989. www.ymcasouth.org.nz/recreation-wellbeing/facilities/

Australia

Cliffhanger Climbing Gym Altona Nth VIC

Concession rate entry for NZAC adult members.

Admission: adults $17, students $15, 12 and under $12, bouldering $10. Passes and gear hire available. Cnr Grieves Parade & Dohertys Road, Altona Nth, Vic. Ph: 3025 +61 (0)3 9369 6400

www.cliffhanger.com.au