THE CLIMBER

NEW ZEALAND'S CLIMBING MAGAZINE

ISSUE 112
WINTER 2020

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE
NEW ZEALAND ALPINE CLUB

SNAPPED

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Lucas Larraman with his nose to the grindstone on the Quantum Field friction test, *Ocean* (V6).
CALEB BRYANT

Uprising

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ON THE COVER
Alec McCallum lining up the 'drive-by' dyno at the end of the crux sequence on *Busta Drive-By* (31) at The Chasm. This route, established by Derek Thatcher in 2006, went 14 years without a second ascent until both Josh Cornah and Alec made successful ascents this summer. TOM HOYLE

THIS PAGE
David Henley getting established on the North Ridge of Mt Sefton on a fine summers day. The Copland valley lies below. GAVIN LANG

DEPARTMENTS

TOM HOYLE

EDITORIAL

'DISRUPTION' became a buzzword in the years preceding 2020, when it was tossed around as a kind of postmodern corporate strategy. This year, it has been a word of near ubiquitous relevance.

In introducing this first-ever, made-for-digital edition of *The Climber* magazine, it is worth noting how the global pandemic and ensuing financial and social shocks have disrupted the New Zealand Alpine Club. We've seen a significant loss of revenue from the postponement of the Banff Film Tour, lost sales, cancelled travel insurance, reduced hut use and fewer memberships. As a result, we have lost two staff members from the national office with almost 30 years of collective service to the club between them. I'm sure the thanks and best wishes of all club members past and present go with Margaret and Narina in their future endeavours. We've also been forced to modify the services we provide and the way that we provide them. Hence issue 112 of *The Climber* appears in digital form only.

At the risk of jumping on the disruption buzzword bandwagon, these times are also a great opportunity. A crisis often requires immediate responses without the luxury of time for reflection. But while essential workers were run off their feet, many of us found ourselves in enforced lock-down and working reduced hours. This gifted us an unprecedented amount of time for reflection on aspects of our lives, from work/life balance to the role of social media and how some people are systematically disadvantaged by the structures and institutions of our society.

Disruption has forced change in the short term to how NZAC communicates with members. At the same time, the chance to reflect has produced a number of ideas for improving NZAC's climbing media in the future. The NZAC board has tentatively approved a proposal to enhance the provision of high-quality print and online content to members. This is a change that I am excited to be part of, so watch this space for further developments.

In this time of sudden disruption to our normal routines, the value of our community has come to the fore. Things we took for granted were suddenly less certain and we have all re-learned the value of our common interactions. As the wider world still suffers under terrible circumstances from COVID-19, we have closed our borders. We are, more than we've been for some time, a New

Zealand climbing community (at least until our Australian members are able to travel here again). This is giving us a rare opportunity to define what that community means to us and shape it in a way that we can be proud of. The changes we are proposing for NZAC publications will, we hope, contribute to supporting and strengthening the New Zealand climbing community.

A recent discussion on our club Facebook page highlighted some of the challenges of thinking of ourselves as a community of climbers. For those that (possibly wisely) steer clear of Facebook and the ochlocracy of open comment threads, the topic of discussion was the offensive names given to some climbs, the harm this causes our community and whether and how we might take action. The issues involved mirror the complexity of contemporary race, gender and sexual relations. Access to climbing areas is at stake, as is the perception of climbing in the wider community. There is a broad diversity of voices and contrary opinions. For many people, harm and offence, systemic violence and discrimination are daily experiences. For others, they appear to exist more as abstract concepts, which makes the hurt caused by a name seem hard to comprehend and even illogical.

Some were outspoken about the way changing the names of routes might deny autonomy and disrespect the efforts of route developers. While all opinions are welcome in a discussion of this type (and I'll be seeking out future op-ed pieces so you hear from voices other than mine), the difficulty with this approach is that it tends to focus on individuals rather than the wider community issues at play. Excusing offensive climb names based on their origins in an anti-establishment counter-culture movement, or explaining away the potential harm that offensive names may cause (by stating that missing context provides adequate explanation) may be valid in the context of individual climbs, but it completely misses the wider point. This isn't about vilifying those who have chosen these names. It is first and foremost about clearing obstacles to making the climbing community a better place, in which all groups in our society will feel welcome.

Also raised by dissenting voices were 'where will it end?', thin end of the wedge, slippery slope-type arguments. I find these arguments unconvincing. If taking action in this way at this time is wrong, say why. Don't project where it might lead. It seems like a backwards approach to suggest that change might lead to future harm without explaining how, particularly when the proposed change aims to reduce actual harm in the present.

As a sage climbing partner repeatedly tells me, 'everything changes'. In these disruptive times, change has been forced upon us. Let's use the opportunity to make our community, and our Club, better for climbers. If anyone can navigate a slippery slope successfully, it is we climbers. That's what we're all about. C

ABOVE Erica Gatland climbs the Caffeine Wall finger-destroyer, *Ristretto* (V10). TOM HOYLE
PREVIOUS PAGE David Henley and Ruari MacFarlane on the upper North Ridge of Mt Sefton, with the Fiddian Glacier below. GAVIN LANG

PAGE 7 Barnaby Bruce tackles *Safety Bufffalo* (24), at Froggatt Edge. JOHN PALMER
FOLLOWING PAGE Jane Presto bags an ascent of the crimpy Blue Wall route *Skinhead* (30), at the Gentleman's Club, Wanaka. DOM CHANNON

ABOVE Steve Eastwood at Temple Basin. MARK WARNER / LPP

BELOW Niky Ceria makes the first ascent of the non-rectilinear The *Fish Eye Arête*, Red Rocks, USA. NIKY CERIA

THE CLIMBER
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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.

ELECTION FOR PRESIDENT

NOMINATIONS ARE now open for the election of President of the New Zealand Alpine Club. The call for nominations closes 5pm, 24 July. This year, the last stage of the transition to the new governance structure calls for the election of the next President, with the position to take effect as from 1 October, 2021, when our current President will become Past President. In the year from 1 October 2020, the President Elect will join the Board to ensure effective succession planning for the oversight of our organisation. If you have a passion for the future of the club, an interest in providing leadership to the Board, staff and members, and experience which will benefit the club, all the required information is now on our web-site at: www.alpineclub.org.nz/the-nzac/club-structure/elections/.

NIBS

THIS YEAR'S National Indoor Bouldering Series is under way. The first event was held at Hangdog Gym in Wellington on 20 June, with a good turnout. Given the COVID-19 circumstances, the series had some last minute restructuring as a result of travel restrictions. The Queenstown event has been postponed until 19 September and this year NIBS will not operate as an ongoing competitive series, but rather as a series of standalone events, with no overall series winners.

NZAC MEMBERSHIP DISCOUNTS

AS WE head into winter, don't forget that your NZAC membership grants you discounts at many of New Zealand's most popular skifields. Head to the website to see what is offered at each field: www.alpineclub.org.nz/membership-benefits/member-discounts/

With less professional instruction courses on offer from the club this winter, don't forget that your membership grants you discounts with many guiding companies and other professional instruction providers who offer equivalent training. The relevant organisations are listed here: www.alpineclub.org.nz/membership-benefits/member-discounts/?region_filter=&category_filter=courses-non-nzac.

OFFICE HOURS

NZAC NATIONAL Office is now open again for business. However, with the loss of administration staff and these adminstrative duties now covered by the remaining staff members, public open hours are at reduced capacity. If you'd like to come into the Home of Climbing to discuss membership, purchase a guidebook, or if you have other business, we are open between 9am to 1pm on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. The office will be staffed outside of these times, but staff may not always be available to assist you with enquiries.

NEW EDITION MT ASPIRING/TITITEA GUIDEBOOK

NICK SHEARER and Neil Sloan are working on a new edition of the Mount Aspiring Region guidebook. This new edition will be expanded to include the Forbes Mountains.

The four major blocks of peaks comprehensively covered will be:

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

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

The authors are also looking for other contributions, including:

-high resolution colour photographs.
-information on errors and omissions in the current (2016) edition.
-suggestions for improvements to the current edition.
-changes to existing routes, access and huts.
-new routes.

Please contact the authors directly:
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THE LONG WHITE NANNY STATE

THE LAWS and regulations that define acceptable risk and personal choice are constantly changing—and in one specific direction. As the outdoors gets safer, DOC tries to take more responsibility for natural hazards. But if left unchecked, I'm concerned this will impact our freedom in the hills.

Climbers are often seeking out what is judged to be well above acceptable risk. Once climbers were rebelling against society and challenging anyone to stop them; we've all heard the oldies brag about it. Unsurprisingly, many of them have changed their opinions with age—'I've done it all, so you don't have to'—and now they're some of the first to add fixed gear in the mountains. But I think most of us agree on one thing: the mountains should remain a wild refuge to get away from the regulation of day-to-day life.

National parks are supposed to belong to the people of New Zealand, with DOC as their caretaker. But it seems to me that this is changing and I feel that DOC is overstepping its jurisdiction. Gone are the days when DOC was on the side of recreational users. Now they seem mostly worried about tourists not paying enough or getting lost on a track.

I noticed many similarities during a year in Canada, climbing predominantly in Banff National Park and the Stawamus Provincial Park. Both are highly regulated, with Banff costing $10 a day for entry, plus additional fees for camping. The park is expensive and tame, walking trails are like small roads and, if you want to camp, it must be at a designated site with toilets. Sites cost around $20-$30 per night, or there are expensive lodges on many of the popular tracks. Not exactly what I am looking for, or what I would call affordable.

I hope New Zealand never gets this bad, but I think it will if we don't find some acceptable middle ground and stop heading in this direction. The Great Walks are already similar, restricting access through some of the most stunning parts of New Zealand. And more of them are cropping up. Originally sold to us as a means to keep tourists off the other tracks, they have been widely marketed and now sell out in a matter of days. They cost a ridiculous amount and are effectively babysitting tourists through the mountains.

I think that everyone has different levels of risk they are okay with—and while educating people is great, too much control isn't. The direction we appear to be taking as a country is towards more control. DOC now closes tracks when they deem conditions too dangerous for the least experienced amongst us, and I have heard of them attempting to enforce this with rangers, which presently has very little legal standing. However, their legal powers are increasing; by-laws to allow DOC land managers to close our national parks already exist in a few of the parks.

Recently, there was a storm down south. You might've heard about it as it flooded most of Southland and did a number on the Milford highway. I was one of the lucky sods in Homer Hut at the time. What better place to be trapped and to see one of the most impressive storms on record. As anyone who has spent some time down there would know, when it stops raining, the river vanishes and the Darrans remain unchanged. Who needs a road when half the climbing is walking distance from the hut? Unfortunately, civil defence didn't see it this way and we were quickly evacuated—even before those trapped on the Great Walks. Unlike the high paying tourists on the cruise boats, we were shipped off without most of our gear, which was left sodden in a bunk room. I then spent two weeks in Te Anau during the biggest high of the year, while a 'civil emergency' was in place in all of Fiordland. Apparently, a damaged road requires the whole park's closure to fix.

As climbers, I think that most of us have strong opinions on freedom in the outdoors and should be concerned with the direction DOC is taking. While it has only affected a few areas so far, it is likely to become a larger issue. It appears to me that DOC is tightening its grip and trying to tame our national parks. I personally love the freedom of our mountains and hope that future generations will have the same opportunities to express themselves as we currently have. I would like to see some advocacy from NZAC, who generally remain silent on these kinds of issues, and I welcome a response if anyone else has thoughts on this matter.

I would also recommend reading an opinion piece in the November 2012 *FMC Bulletin* called 'A Brief Question: Public Land Access Rights and DOC', for a longer and more educated opinion. It has been reproduced online if that issue of the *Bulletin* is not available to you.

-Josh Cornah

MUTUAL EXCHANGE

I AM a keen climber who is also a student of te reo Māori and Māori culture, and I have some thoughts on the access issues involving Māori.

John Palmer hit the nail on the head when he said that there is a mutual exchange that needs to happen between climbers and Māori.

We have to ask some hard questions of ourselves as climbers. Are we damaging the natural environment when we climb or develop new crags? Are we being up-front with iwi about this? Do we actually care about Māori culture, or is it only when they close access to us? These are questions which I believe will be awkward and difficult for us as a community to answer honestly. However, if we are serious about working with iwi on access issues rather than continuing the current status quo of an underhanded game of cat and mouse, then this is the difficult road we must take.

We also have to remember the overall context in which we live. Colonisation of Aotearoa was, and in many ways still is, devastating for Māori. Let's face it, climbers are an overwhelmingly white and privileged group. So when we demand access to areas of natural beauty and other cultural significance in order to undertake our activity, many Māori understandably view this as just a further intrusion onto what little ancestral land they have remaining, further destruction of the natural environment, and a continuation of colonisation.

Let's not forget that we live in a country where confiscated Māori land has, among other things, been turned into golf courses despite the protestations of the traditional landowners that the land contained urupā (burial sites). We need to be aware of our history in order to provide context to this issue. Our history in this country is very recent, although most Pākehā (myself included, until recently) tend to think that everything is all good

and all that bad stuff happened a long time ago. Any thought that the historical problems have been fixed by the Waitangi Tribunal gravely underestimates the mamae (pain) that many Māori are still carrying over atrocities that happened in the very recent past: the confiscation of their ancestral lands; the loss of their culture, language, and identity; the ongoing racism towards Māori in this country, both casual and systemic.

Māori see themselves as intrinsically linked to their environment. They consider themselves descendants of the natural world. The trees, animals and mountains are their elders. In Māori culture, this is why you do not step on the summit of a mountain; it's the same as stepping on the head of your tupuna (ancestor). Unfortunately, most climbers in Aotearoa are unaware of this, or are aware but do not care. This symbolises the struggle at hand, the cultural breakdown between climbers and Māori.

Climbing activity can negatively affect the environment in a number of ways. When routes are developed and 'cleaned', that usually involves destruction of the vegetation on that climb. I'm not just talking about pulling shrubs out of cracks. I have seen crags where whole trees—and majestic climbing rata vines—have been unceremoniously cut down and dumped at the bottom of the cliff. Don't get me wrong. I don't believe it is always wrong to cut down a tree, but let's think about the way we are doing these things and whether it can be done better. Chalk is often overused and becomes a blight on the aesthetic of cliffs. Rubbish is inevitably left. (I know, it's not you, and it's not me either, but someone always does it). Drilling and bolting is a whole other issue in itself. All of these issues need serious thought and consideration as to a way forward which would be acceptable to Māori, and in line with Māori values. If we are talking about creating a unified approach, these are issues that need serious consideration and leadership by NZAC, before approaching iwi.

What I believe is that for us to continue to be able to climb outdoors in this country—and I absolutely hope that is the case—there needs to be a real paradigm shift in the climbing community. It is not enough to educate Māori about climbing. We must educate climbers about Māori. We must be ready to be absolutely up-front and transparent about where we are climbing, how we are climbing, and what places we would like to be able to climb. We must undertake these discussions in a respectful way, and be absolutely prepared to accept 'no' as an answer. If a place is tapu to an iwi, we absolutely should not climb there. If we are unable to convince an iwi that we should be allowed to climb somewhere, whether due to environmental considerations or any other cultural considerations, we should accept their wishes and look elsewhere. We must be ready to compromise.

Māori culture is incredibly rich and it is to our own detriment in this country that we have suppressed and ignored it for so long. All people in this country, not simply climbers, would benefit from learning about this unique culture. Māori share many values with climbers, including a strong sense of community, a reverence for the natural environment and the love of a physical challenge. It is our challenge to fix and build on this relationship in a humble and genuinely caring way.

It is up to us as climbers to prove and demonstrate to iwi that we do care about Māori cultural values, we do care about the environment and that our being in a certain place has an overall benefit, not an overall detriment, to that place. I think we have a long way to go to be truthfully at that point, but we must start on that long road now. If we approach this in the wrong way, before we are truly ready, we risk doing more damage than good in the long run.

The NZAC should take the lead on this, starting with ongoing discussions about this issue, educating climbers through *The Climber* or other avenues and promoting ongoing cultural exchange between climbing and Māori communities. I hope that as a community, but also individually, we can find the humility and maturity to take a deep look into ourselves, acknowledge some hard truths, and move ahead positively.

-Erin Allison-Maxwell

WHAT MATTERS

IN 2017, Dan Head climbed a route at Kawakawa Bay and called it *Black Climbs Matter*. The guide has nothing to say about why he chose this name. I think it is a reasonable assumption that the name refers to Black Lives Matter (BLM).

Three Black women—Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi—founded BLM in 2013 after George Zimmerman was acquitted of murdering Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old black high school student who he fatally shot in Sanford, Florida. BLM advocates for racial justice in America and against police violence against black people. Many in America at that time, including Hillary Clinton, responded by arguing that 'All Lives Matter'.

America promises life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, but it was founded on the subjugation of black people. There is a direct line from slavery to segregation to the armed police now on America's streets and the killing of George Floyd. That is the malignant truth that BLM seeks to highlight.

BLM began because it was so clear that all lives *didn't* matter. To say 'all lives matter' effectively defends the status quo. To say 'black climbs matter' trivialises the suffering of black individuals and communities. Let's be honest: in this context, climbing does not matter.

In 2017, it might have been possible to argue that calling a climb *Black Climbs Matter* was not particularly objectionable. I would have disagreed–but–Hillary Clinton!

In 2020, Donald Trump has called BLM a symbol of hate but roughly two-thirds of Americans (and majorities of both Republicans and Democrats) support the protests against the killing of George Floyd.

In New Zealand there have been BLM demonstrations. And our police commissioner Andy Coster said this:

> 'While I believe New Zealand's style of policing is different to that we see in many other countries, we have to acknowledge that criminal justice outcomes for Māori in particular are appalling. This is not a situation that we should ever accept and I do not accept it.'

There are things about this country that need to change and there are people who are ready to try and make those changes. The name of this climb needs to change too. I am hopeful that the developers and guidebook writers at Kawakawa are ready for that.

If you are not, think about this. The Kawakawa Bay Scenic Reserve land was once part of the Tihoi 3B block, a vast (and immensely valuable) stretch of dense podocarp forest that stretched from Whangamata Bay, where Kinloch is now, to the maunga of Pureora and Titiraupenga in the west. Historian Paul Hamer writes that the Crown first tried to buy the various partitions of Tihoi 3B in 1919. The Māori owners refused. Until 1956, the Crown resorted to provisions of various Native Land Acts that enabled it to prohibit the owners from selling or leasing to anyone but the Crown. The result, Hamer says, was that owners were 'starved of an income and usually relented to a sale'. Tihoi 3B7—the headland at Kawakawa that contains more or less all the climbing there except the Cracks Wall—is one of the few remaining Māori-owned parts of this block.

– Richard Thomson

THIS ISSUE'S PRIZE GOES TO:
JOSH CORNAH

CHASING THE HIGH

LUCKY CHARMS

BY DEREK CHENG
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY RONNIE BAKER

The last memory I have before the accident is of sitting leisurely on a wide ledge, finishing a Clif bar and marvelling at the beauty of a perfect morning in the mountains of the Sierra Nevada, California.

The first memory I have afterwards is of waking up on my left side, rolling my achy body over and sitting up, my face numb and blanketed in blood.

My back whimpered in protest at the slightest movement. Enough time had already passed for the blood around my left eye to have caked, fusing it shut.

It was just after noon on a cloudless, July day. I was alone and 300m up the southwest face of Clyde Minaret. Far below was Minaret Lake, from where a trail meandered 12 km through forest and across a river to my van, which was another hour's drive from civilisation.

It was the latest of many solo mountain missions, the appeal of which understandably eludes most sane people—and many climbers, too—because of the normally fatal consequences of a fall.

Astute readers of *The Climber* will be aware that I've already traversed the ins and outs of free soloing (#108) and why we may choose to do it—so I won't rehash that here.

The Minarets Traverse crosses the tops of 20-odd granite peaks in a remote area of the Sierras. Climbing legend Peter Croft was the first to do the traverse in under 24 hours, declaring it one of his 'toughest days in the mountains', but also one of his most spectacular.

I had decided to start early, carry enough gear—a half rope, a half-set of wires and a bunch of tat—to bail from anywhere, and to trim the enormity of the undertaking by cutting out the first few and possibly the last few peaks.

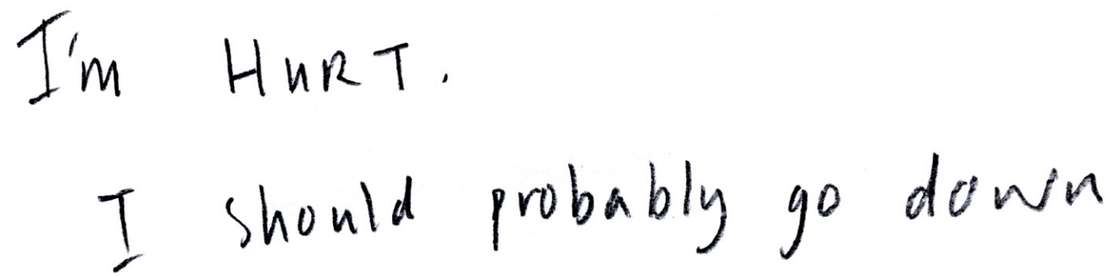
The day had proceeded as many alpine days before it: a pre-dawn start, a slight stumble finding the trail, reaching Minaret Lake with the first rays of dawn, and the exhilaration of tagging the first peaks.

Somewhere on the south or southwest face of Clyde Minaret, a class 3 or 4 scramble up the crown jewel of the range, I came unstuck and fell some distance, landing on a flat ledge.

My face and shins appeared to have taken the brunt of the initial impact before my body rolled into an unconscious heap. Head trauma amnesia meant I had only a vague recollection of where I had been, or how far I had fallen.

I woke up at some point and realised the strap of my pack had ripped off. I have no memory of this, but I must have repaired it with some cord, taken a blurry selfie, and then passed out again.

The next time I awoke, about an hour had passed. I slowly rolled over. Pushed myself up. A deep exhale. A gingerly hop on each leg. Everything seemed to be working okay.



'I'm hurt. I should probably go down,' was literally the extent of my thought process. Is a nightmarish scenario still a nightmare if you're blissfully unaware of it?

I thought I had escaped serious injury, but scans would later show that a tremendous force struck my left cheek—just below my helmet—collapsing all the bones around my left eye. So heavy was the blow that my brain started bleeding in the left frontal lobe, while the impact reverberated through my skull with such force as to leave my right eye black in the coming days.

Both my shins had deep, bloody gashes. Other abrasions marked where bones were fractured (neck-C7, lumbar spine-L3 and L4) or ligaments torn or completely ruptured (behind the left shoulder, right knee, left wrist).

The injuries on the rest of my body indicated some tumbling. My bloated hands suggested I had held them out to soften the blow. A mark on my chest showed where my right lung was bruised. A cut to my pants left bloody streaks down the right side of my backside.

My movements were far from fluid as I made my way down the nearest col. When it became too steep to down-climb, I pulled out my half-rope and set of wires—and started rappelling. I have a distinct memory of deep frustration as I struggled with my swollen hands and blunt knife to cut and tie cord to use as slings to rappel from.

At one point, I was too exhausted to continue and found somewhere to lie down, immediately falling asleep for who knows how long.

I also had to fight the temptation to down-climb sections that normally would have been easy. At one point, I was trying to stretch my foot to a knob while I had my right hand in a rattly fist jam and was crimping a tiny edge with my left. Instead of just going for it, I gave in to common sense and climbed back up, found another bollard to sling, and rappelled.

It took me about eight hours and five or six abseils before I reached the scree slope. The lack of depth perception from having only one good eye sent me tumbling over frequently, and I soon resigned myself to falling onto my back, thinking it the fastest way down with the least amount of fuss. As soon as I reached snow, I moved onto my butt and slid.

The descent would normally have taken a couple of hours, but it was almost dark by the time I reached Minaret Lake. I stopped to try to eat, only to be stifled by my inability to chew. 'Just bruising,' I thought. It didn't occur to me that my jaw might be broken, which it was.

The glare of my headlamp replaced the evening hues of the sky as I hiked into the forest. My memory of this period is hazy. I seem to have circled around repeatedly, deliriously lost, and covering a distance in six hours that should have taken about one hour.

Eventually I lay down on the forest floor and passed out. At one point, I distinctly remember discussing strategies to get home with a number of friends beneath the forest canopy. Either I was hallucinating, or having vivid dreams.

At first light, after a few hours of shivery sleep, I awoke to mosquitoes biting exposed skin. I sat up with anchors in my flesh. My hallucination or dream was so fresh in my mind that I expected to see familiar, friendly faces next to me, but there were none.

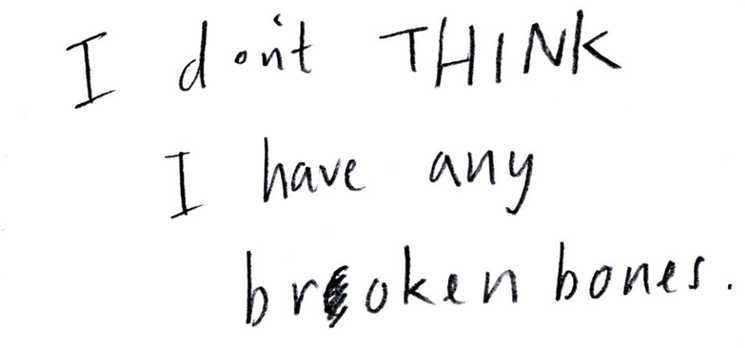
I had no idea how far from the track I had strayed, and I headed vaguely towards river sounds. To my extreme good fortune, the woods eventually parted to reveal the trail.

Within a few hours, I crossed the river and allowed myself a pinch of satisfaction, knowing that the track ahead was wider and more amicable. This section was also a popular hike, and it wasn't long before I crossed paths with a couple who were aghast at my blood-covered self. Somehow, I convinced them I was perfectly capable of hiking alone to the start of the track, but the next people I came across were not so easily persuaded.

One guy accompanied me in the final 45 minutes of hiking. We reached the trailhead roughly 24 hours after the accident, and this good soul then drove me in my van to Mammoth Hospital.

Soon I was in the safe bosom of emergency care, slipping in and out of consciousness as a nurse gently dabbed the blood from my face.

My hospital notes show that I told staff I didn't think I had any broken bones, nor did I consider myself in severe pain. They must have thought me mad, or at least completely incapable of self-diagnosis.

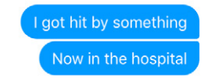


'Patient covered in blood,' the hospital report states. 'Essentially covered head to toe in contusions, abrasions, and lacerations ... multiple internal injuries including 1-2cm head bleed ... multiple facial fractures ... possibly unstable.'

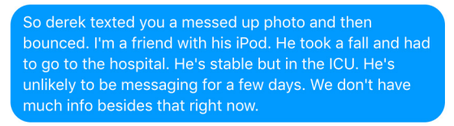
I had also lost about a third of my blood and was so dehydrated that I was in the beginnings of renal failure. There were no facilities in Mammoth Hospital for traumatic brain injuries, so I was choppered to Renown Medical Centre in Reno.

But I was too out of it to assess what any of that meant. On too many sedatives to be aware of the gravity of my injuries, my main priority was to message the climbing partner I was meant to meet the following day, as well as the few people who knew about my solo mission. I did so, switched off all devices—I incoherently thought that saving battery would be wise—and then passed out.

But my messages were typical of someone who wasn't thinking straight. 'I got hit by something ... Now in the hospital' did nothing to reassure friends.



A flurry of phone calls and hospital drive-bys led to the amazingly pleasant surprise of having two angelic friends, Alaina and Lauren, at my bedside when I awoke in Reno in the Intensive Care Unit.



'You looked fucked up, covered head to toe in blood and swelling,' Alaina told me later. 'You clearly had a brain injury. You kept repeating the same things to us: "So nice of you to come visit," "What did you climb today?", "Where are you guys camping?", "So nice of you to come visit."'

My left eye was thankfully okay, a fact they discovered after painfully ripping it free from its prison of congealed blood. But the surgeons told my friends they may have to slice open my brain to ease the pressure of the swelling if the bleeding worsened.

The disturbing sight of my injuries was punctuated with moments of comic relief. After I was given a tetanus shot in Mammoth, the staff followed routine practice and placed a bandaid where the needle had punctured me. It was laughable to Lauren and Alaina to see me lying there with bloodied, untreated injuries but with the tiniest of bandaids on my shoulder.

All of this went on without my awareness. I was full of fentanyl—an opioid stronger than heroin—which seemed to embolden my facetious nature. When my delirium was broken up with discussions about facial reconstructive surgery to repair my dented face, I started requesting half a dragon or penguin face to complement my existing human one.

(It's laughable that my consent for significant surgery can be taken seriously in such conditions.)

Another time, I was given a breathing test and told that my lung capacity was extremely impressive. When I was later asked standard health questions about my alcohol, smoking and drug habits, I dryly answered that I was a heavy whiskey

drinker, a daily smoker, and that LSD was awesome and directly responsible for my amazing lungs. The nursing staff thought that my response was a sign that my brain injury might be worsening, but my friends assured them that it was more or less normal banter.

When I came out of surgery, still on fentanyl, my friend Hannah was at my bedside, and in fits of laughter in an effort to convince me to keep my clothes on. Apparently I found the temperature to be unbearably warm and thought the only solution was not only to remove all my clothing, but to announce this with repeated use of the words ‘expose’ and ‘penis’.

It wasn't until days after my surgery—when I was on less powerful drugs—that the severity of my injuries hit me. It had been almost a week and my face was still all puffed up to resemble some sort of lopsided Frankenstein.

The surgeon had pinned five titanium plates across my shattered, displaced facial bones to hold them in the right position and give them a chance to heal. The area under my eye was also shattered, and a titanium plate was inserted in the base of my eye socket to prevent my eyeball from dropping down.

Damage to my infra-orbital nerve, just under the eye, numbed all sensation from my lips to my left temple. Taking a shower and feeling nothing on your cheek is a surreal experience.

While my continued coherence meant that the brain bleed had thankfully retreated, the reality of a long recovery with an uncertain outcome remained.

Friends called and came to visit as word of my accident spread. Many went above and beyond, responding to messages when I was unconscious, collecting my van from Mammoth, offering me a place to recover, bringing me milkshakes, burgers and noodles, and generally being the most amazing people in history.

One friend who visited told me intimate details of surviving his own free solo accident. Following what happens in most solo falls, he had shattered his ankles and pelvis, but he happened to be in a spot with mobile coverage and was rescued. I felt comparatively lucky after he told me he’d had no feeling in his genitals for months.

One day, for something different, I requested and was given the opioid oxycodone and spent the day walking laps of the ward, chatting garrulously to patients and staff.

But most of the time, I ate and slept.

Meanwhile my ability to do basic math problems seemed to suggest my brain was doing fine, and after ten days in hospital, I was allowed to leave in a neck brace and be driven to a friend’s place in California.

Energy reserves were low for the first weeks. I would sleep, cook, sleep, walk around the block, then sleep some more. Much of my energy was spent wrestling with my insurance company which, predictably, was reluctant to pay the US$300,000-odd in medical bills.

The other behemoth to negotiate was the American healthcare system. I had to find a doctor and get a note before I could have follow-up x-rays or book a physio appointment.

Getting an indication of the cost of physio—my insurance policy included a $50 payment towards the bill—was exhausting. The clinic I contacted told me to ask my insurance company because that's where they sent the bill, and it was up to the company how to break down the costs. The company told me to call the clinic—how would they know what the clinic charged? I went to and fro, and eventually the clinic gave me a $100 estimate.

After one appointment, they sent me a $500 bill—which remains unpaid.

As my recovery slowly ticked on, I learned that a neck brace was extremely good at eliciting offers to skip the queue at the green grocer. I eventually learned the joys of being able to open my jaw wide enough to eat a dumpling in one mouthful—the true yardstick of any culinary joy. My walks around the block became five kilometres, then ten kilometres into the hills above Berkeley.

LEFT The DIY half-dragon face, not recommended. DEREK CHENG

BELOW Minaret Lake and surrounds. Clyde Minaret is the shark's fin-shaped peak above the red patch of rock, just right of centre. After the accident, Derek descended the shady col left of the red patch. DEREK CHENG

After six weeks, I had a check-up with the neurosurgeon whose first question was whether I remembered him at all, which of course I didn't. He then shared our last conversation in which I had apparently become increasingly disheartened at his prognosis of no climbing for several months.

When he said my bones were healing well, I asked if I could stop eating so many sardines. He gave me a puzzled look and, after I told him what the internet had suggested I eat in order to promote bone growth, he said that I could, indeed, stop eating so many sardines.

My brain appeared to be fine, he said. I asked him what his thoughts were about my attending Burning Man. He responded with non-committal hearty laughter, which I took for a full endorsement.

The plastic surgeon who put my face back together was less jovial, and his answers to my questions seemed to depend on his mood. He initially told me a couple of months would be a good base for recovery, which led me to make a mental note of Creeks-giving (November Thanksgiving in Indian Creek). At a subsequent check up, his answer changed to 'years' after I told him about a paper I had read showing that serious facial nerve damage was unlikely to recover within a year.

Predictably, over the weeks and months ahead, my bones healed much quicker than the soft tissue damage. My right shin had smashed into the ground in the same way that it might hit the dashboard in a head-on car collision. It was shunted backwards with a force that ruptured the PCL (posterior cruciate ligament). Two years on, I still can't bend it fully.

A tear to a ligament in my left shoulder and left wrist took several months to feel good enough to weight. When I eventually tried to climb again, I couldn't do anything that demanded much from my left shoulder.

By this time, I had returned to New Zealand to earn dollars while I recovered and to bask in the glory that is ACC (it covers overseas accidents if you spend more than half the year in New Zealand). While I waited for MRIs, x-rays and ultrasounds, I wasn't allowed any exercise other than walking and cycling.

It was a blessing, really, to diversify into road cycling, and within six months I had cycled the Tour Aotearoa trail from Wellington to Wanaka. When an MRI confirmed that the ACL (anterior cruciate ligament) in my right knee was, in fact, okay, I was allowed to start running. I was never much of a runner, but I came to love the trails around Wellington's town belt and in the Tararuas.

In between earning coin, I put together the most comprehensive insurance appeal of all time, only to have it rejected. It shouldn't come as any surprise that the grounds for rejection were completely bogus: that I was

RIGHT The many faces of a long recovery. DEREK CHENG

above the altitude limit for climbing coverage, and that I wasn't wearing the appropriate head safety equipment.

The altitude limit was 4500m above sea level. There are no parts of California above 4500m. Even if I had been on the Clyde Minaret summit, I would have had to be 800m tall to breach the limit—and most of me would still have been technically covered. And judging by the photo I had sent through of my bloodied face in my climbing helmet, they seem to have expected me to have been wearing a gladiatorial face-guard of epic proportions.

The real crux of my claim—which was not addressed in the rejection letter—was that I needed to show that I was "adequately supervised". This meant I had to demonstrate that I was skilled and experienced enough to undertake the traverse without any supervision.

I drew up a climbing CV and had half a dozen guides—some I knew and some I didn't—write testimonials that said, in their professional opinion, that I was more than competent to be where I was on my own. If my case ever went to court, I hoped that their signed statements would hold considerable sway.

In the meantime, I accepted that I was never going to be able to pay those bills, and it seemed likely I would never set foot in the US again.

The next step was to lay a complaint with the state insurance regulator, which I did. I doubt the insurance company even looked at the substance of my claim until I had done that. Days later, they contacted me to say the decision had been overturned and the bills would be paid.

Roughly two years have now passed, and one of the biggest surprises is how much swelling I had in my face, and how it continues to go down. It was noticeably lopsided in the months after returning to New Zealand. The passport office even told me that the photo I had sent in for my application had been taken too close to my face because it was 'all distorted'. I guffawed to the rafters. 'That's just how my face looks now,' I told the embarrassed caller.

It is still fairly numb, but in a way that feels like I've been slapped rather than flattened by a freight train, and not enough for it to be noticeable most of the time.

Last summer, about 18 months after the accident, I spent two and a half months in the South Island climbing as much as possible. It was my first real attempt at climbing since the accident, and I was delighted to be able to climb without feeling stymied by injury.

Giving up climbing altogether has never crossed my mind. The Climbing High has given me so much, and as long as I am able, I plan to continue pursuing it. Perhaps a more pertinent question I'm often asked is whether I would go on a solo alpine mission again, and I already have—though the Remarkables Grand Traverse is certainly much tamer than the Minarets.

Would I do the Minarets Traverse again? That's a harder question. There are always so many variables in the equation, including the weather forecast, your level of recent experience, and how you are feeling on the day.

One item I didn't have but should've had was a Personal Locator Beacon—though given how oblivious I was to my injuries and the fact that I eventually walked out on my own, I doubt I would have used it.

(Curiously, using one would have left me with a $100,000+ fee; the insurance fine-print said all chopper evacuations had to have prior approval, which would have been impossible as I was outside any mobile coverage.)

I don't think I was punching above my weight with the traverse, but I'm certainly aware that I could have easily not survived. My general summation of what happened is that it's one of those things that happen. You can be the most prepared alpinist in the world and be swept away by rockfall, or a complete gumby and return from an adventure unscathed. There is an element of risk and luck in every alpine excursion, and unless you're willing to avoid them altogether—which I'm not—anything can happen.

My accident could be viewed as bad luck if I had been in the path of random rockfall. The king hit also would have hit my helmet if it had struck me two inches higher, which may have spared me a broken face and a brain injury.

But it's also immeasurably lucky that I didn't break a leg, ankle, pelvis, or any other bone that would have made self-extraction a much more doubtful prospect. Nor did I have any seizures—one of the symptoms of a brain bleed—while I was rappelling.

I had also bought insurance only two weeks before the accident. I usually shun insurance unless there is a good reason for it, and I had signed up a day after doing some short-fixing on El Capitan, in Yosemite; I had become suitably unnerved while aid-soloing and staring down at 30m of rope slack blowing ominously in the breeze above 300m of sphincter-pinching exposure.

As far as luck goes, the timing of my insurance purchase is only surpassed by the ledge that I happened to land on. Bouncing all the way to the bottom would have surely been lights out for good.

SWISS SKI TOURING

BY TIM ROBERTSON

My wife Monika and I leave home early. The sound of our ski touring boots on the hard concrete surface feels uncomfortably loud as we walk through our quiet neighbourhood in Switzerland. A brisk 15 minutes later and we're on the train, at 6.30am, and heading up towards the Jungfraujoch from Interlaken. As we change trains at Kleine Scheidegg, there are other ski tourers around. That makes us feel a little less strange among the hundreds of other tourists that look at us as if we are astronauts.

We head up the historic railway into the Eiger tunnel. This is supposedly the world's most expensive train journey, but it's still cheaper than a helicopter flight back in New Zealand. Unfortunately these days we don't stop at the infamous Eiger window, scene of much drama during attempts of the Eiger North Face. I check the Swiss avalanche forecast on my phone. It shows more than 50cm of snow over the last three days.

At 9am, we are out of the station at 3467m and onto the Aletsch Glacier. A ski mountaineer's paradise surrounds us. The Jungfrau (4158m) to our west is capped in cloud. It's blowing and freezing cold as we skin east below the south-west face of the Mönch (4099m). We go to a col just under 3600m. There's loads of snow and we can now see the Fiescherhorn (4049m), our main objective for the trip. Today, though, we plan to let the snow settle a bit and ski the Trugberg. As we drop down the Ewisgschneefäld Glacier, the snow is deep and the first slope is awesome skiing. Eventually, we grind to a halt as it flattens out and we have to push.

We change to skins and skin up to the ski depot just below the Trugberg, before we take off the skis and follow a short boot-pack through the rocks to the summit at 3924m. We walk back down to our skis and look at options to ski. We discuss the avalanche danger as there's still a lot of wind transport, and opt for the warmer but less-loaded and longer line to the south. We find pretty good mashed potato-type snow, or 'hot powder' as some people call it. It changes to spring snow just

ABOVE The author heading to the Fiescherhörner. MONIKA BISCHOF

RIGHT The author skinning up the Trugberg. MONIKA BISCHOF

BELOW Monika Bischof atop the Hinteres Fiescherhorn. TIM ROBERTSON

before we get down to 2800m. We eat a late lunch down in the warmth, stoked with the ski. We skin back up the main tributaries of the Aletsch glacier on the Jungfraufirm. It proves to be a long, hot skin, a few hours longer than we had hoped when we arrive at the Mönchsjoch hut where we will stay the night. First-time visitors always go into shock at the 12 swiss francs charge for a 1.5L water bottle. Locals know that you can get hot water in jugs for half that price, but don't expect the hut guardian to tell you that.

Out the door at 7.30am the next morning, we again head down the Ewisgschneefäld Glacier (which means 'forever snowfield') and over to below our route up to the summits of the Fiescherhorn. It's a cold transition as we put on skins and head up the steepening glacier towards the start of the climb to the saddle. We do another change, putting skis on our packs and taking out crampons, ice axe and rope. The rope is stashed soon afterwards. Higher up, the conditions

aren't so easy—brittle snow over slabby rock in the shade at nearly 4000m. Once on the saddle, we are finally in the sun. We head for the slightly lower Hinteres (which literally means 'behind') Fiescherhorn (4029m). You can ski almost directly off the top. I'm mindful of the fact that the ski ahead is threatened by seracs and faces directly into the sun, so I'm keen to keep on moving.

The first section of the glacier down the other side is perfect powder. As we swing round into the crux section, it faces directly into the sun. We're glad that we didn't wait until later in the day, as it's crevassed and the seracs aren't looking friendly. The lower part is better—a lot wider and a long, fast ski to just below the Finsteraarhorn hut. That's what's so crazy about ski mountaineering. The down is so fast compared to the up. A short skin takes us up to where we ditch our skis and follow the steps to the hut.

Most people come here to head up to the Finsteraarhorn, the highest summit in the region at 4274m, and it's easy to see why. We've done it before and, for the following day, are eyeing up the shady lines on the opposite side of the valley.

After a great breakfast, we're out of the hut at 7am. Some awful re-frozen ski tracks wake us out of the last of our slumber. They lead us onto the glacier, where we try to hold as much speed as possible to get over the rise in the middle without falling as it's rock-hard. This enables quick skiing over the long distance, and we appreciate this compared to the first day when the powder was slow going.

We begin skinning up our chosen line, the Grosses (big) Wannenhorn. It's easy going most of the way. Ski crampons make the steep, icy section above the col easier. It rolls off as we near the summit. Just as we get on the summit plateau, some cumulus cloud starts blowing in around us.

The cloud clears and we are rewarded with great views. The Berneroberland is showing itself off. We can see a lifetime's worth of good lines: the Jungfrau, Grünhorn and Aletschhorn to name just a few.

The cloud rolls back in as we begin the ski, but visibility improves near the col. The skiing is a lot more enjoyable when you can see more than 20m ahead. Below the col, the snow is still great powder until back onto the main Fiescher glacier.

The snow here is just thawing. We have nice, spring conditions for a few kilometres through the glacier until we reach the crux. This involves some steep snow couloirs over granite slabs, and with the warmer temperatures we can hear streams running under the snowpack. We take care to get the line right, sometimes side-slipping through some sections or holding speed to avoid breaking through. Then we're back on wide open skiing for kilometres. Granite walls surround us, a distraction from the skiing.

Everything flattens out on some moraines at about 1800m, where some lakes are forming. Skis come on and off and a bit of scrub-bashing gets us through sections that have been flattened by avalanche debris. We start walking, cross over a dam and descend some ladders you wouldn't want to fall off. A hiking track leads into the forest and down to a farm road, then out into alpine meadows. The spring flowers are popping out and the birds are excited about spring. It all feels friendly and surreal compared to the summit, more than 2500m higher, where we had been just a few hours earlier. In an hour we arrive at the first town, Fieschertal, and soon we are heading home on the great public transport system. As we change trains, we grab some chips and I get a beer. It is still a novelty for me to be able to eat and drink on public transport. As we slide along inside a quiet Swiss train looking at the countryside, I'm smiling—but it's tinged with sadness too. It's our last trip before we head back to New Zealand.

GETTING AROUND:
Public transport is great and traveling with skis and gear is easy. The Swiss trains 'SBB App' makes planning easier and is available in English. A car can be useful if going to out-of-the-way places or to get an earlier start.

HUTS:
If huts are open, they are catered. All you need is a credit card, sleeping bag liner and toothbrush. Most will have a website, but it's best to call for bookings. When the huts are closed, there are 'winter rooms'—these are like New Zealand alpine huts.

MAPS:
Ski touring maps are available, or pay for the Swisstopo App. These show the routes and other handy info, such as slope angles. A compass and a GPS are essential.

WEATHER AND AVALANCHE INFORMATION:
Swissmeteo or Meteoblue have great weather forecasts for the mountains.

The SLF (Swiss avalanche forecast) is available in English. Read the detail carefully.

All have free Apps available.

GRADES:
Switzerland has a ski touring grading system. It relates to the steepness and fall exposure. **L** easy, **WS** moderate, **ZS** difficult, **S** very difficult (Mt Elie De Beaumont would be about **ZS** if skied from the summit).

TIME TO GO:
March to May for high glacial trips, as by then the crevasses are usually sufficiently covered. Easter and weekends can be crowded.

SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE:
Depending on the grade, you'll need good skiing, alpine climbing, glacier travel and crevasse rescue skills. If in doubt, do something easier or hire a guide.

TOP Heading down the Fiescher glacier. TIM ROBERTSON

BOTTOM Ladders and skis are an unusual combination. TIM ROBERTSON

PREVIOUS PAGE Monika Bischof skis towards the Finsteraarhorn. TIM ROBERTSON

THE BIG FOUR: REDUX

BY ISAAC BUCKLEY

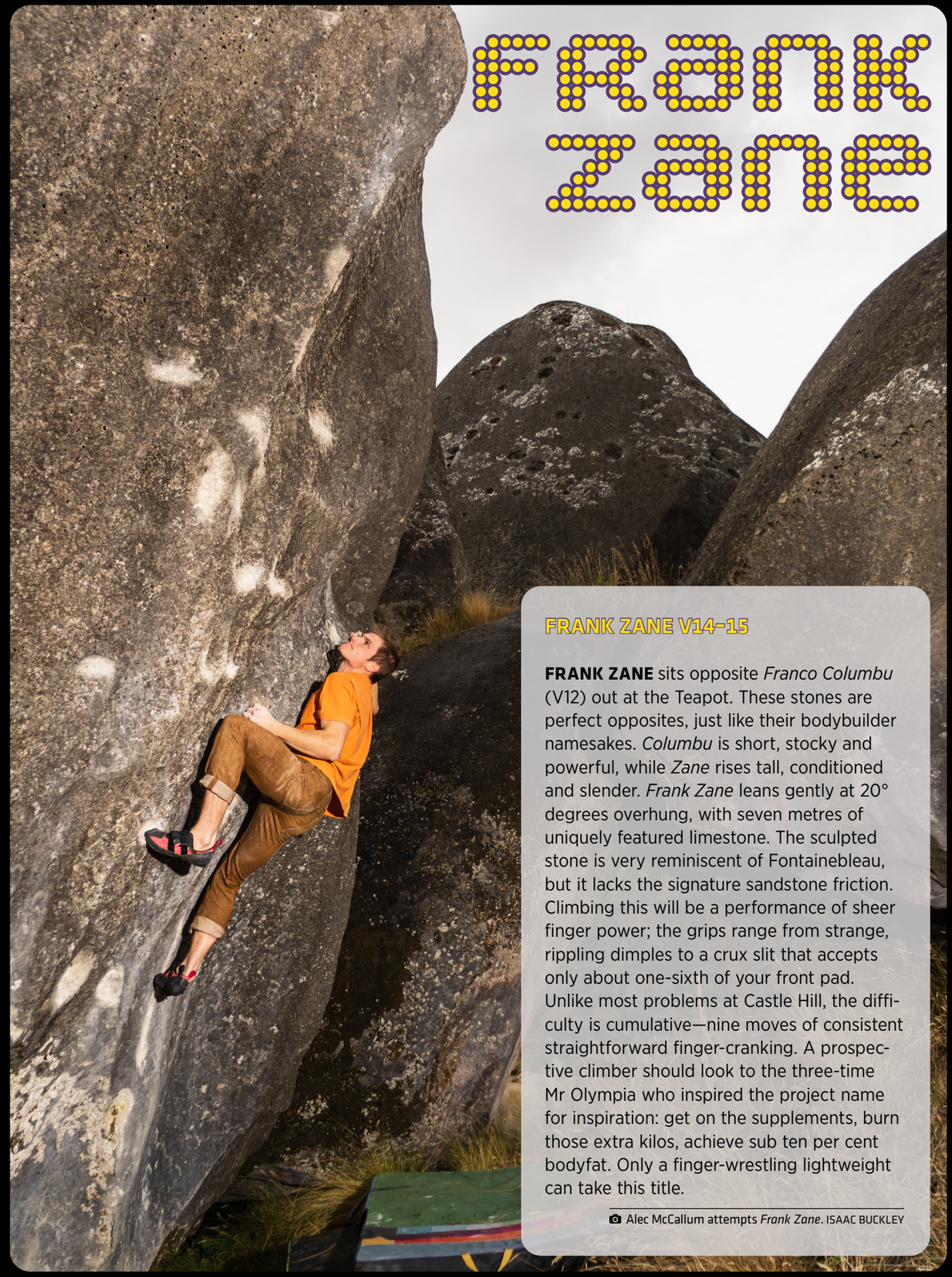
Back in 2008, Tom Hoyle wrote an article fondly remembered by Castle Hill enthusiasts as the 'Big Four' (see *The Climber* #64). Tom chronicled four big projects at Flock Hill that would push our hard bouldering into the future. At the time of print, these problems were the living end of hard, only considered climbable by true rock gods. Derek Thatcher and Stu Kurth knocked off the first two blocs in short order to give us *Weapon Omega* (V11) and *The Little Book of Calm* (V12). Both Stu's and Derek's names are synonymous with elite bouldering in New Zealand, but it took Niky Ceria, an international top shelf boulderer, to complete the last two boulders of the list; *King Line* (V13) in 2016 and finally *Gisele Bündchen* (V11) two years later. Twelve years on from the original article and those future problems are no longer in the future. The list is completed (Niky Ceria has even climbed all four of them) and many more king lines have seen first ascents such as *Psychosis* (V13), *The Big Show* (V11), *Solaris* (V13), *Kingpin* (V12), *Fatal Flaw* (V13) and *The Iron Curtain* (V11), to name a few standouts.

Flock Hill has proven the perfect playground for hard bouldering and the quality is world class, considered by some to be in a league of its own. However, the high end of 'hard' still eludes us. Hard bouldering is continuing to redefine itself overseas and we Kiwis once again find ourselves behind the times. *Trifecta Middle* (V13), long the hardest problem in the country, has now been repeated more times than I can count, and Niky Ceria has flashed it. V13 is old news, so what does a new level of difficulty at Castle Hill look like? To be honest, the answer is 'really improbable'. The lines are so thin that these problems look nearly featureless without a fresh wash. Not to mention the boulders are enormous and the holds are often well hidden by the distinctive grey lichen. Only close inspection on top rope and a thorough oral care treatment (nine out of ten boulderers recommend the brand Reach) reveal the faint possibility of ascent. Put shortly, hard bouldering is inaccessible here, and only the truly deranged and limestone-obsessed dedicate their time to this strange pursuit.

The four projects described here are perfect examples of hard modern bouldering, or 'king lines' as Sharma would put it. They are all distinctly Castle Hill-style challenges; each has a mantle, a couple have highball slab top-outs, and all boast slopers and pinches that keep me up at night. But enough unspecified frothing. It's time for a limestone geek out (alpinists be warned). Here's the new 'Big Four'.

TOP Zac Orme working *The Vatican* on a rope in 2011. JAMES MORRIS

FRANK ZANE



FRANK ZANE V14–15

FRANK ZANE sits opposite *Franco Columbu* (V12) out at the Teapot. These stones are perfect opposites, just like their bodybuilder namesakes. *Columbu* is short, stocky and powerful, while *Zane* rises tall, conditioned and slender. *Frank Zane* leans gently at 20° degrees overhung, with seven metres of uniquely featured limestone. The sculpted stone is very reminiscent of Fontainebleau, but it lacks the signature sandstone friction. Climbing this will be a performance of sheer finger power; the grips range from strange, rippling dimples to a crux slit that accepts only about one-sixth of your front pad. Unlike most problems at Castle Hill, the difficulty is cumulative—nine moves of consistent straightforward finger-cranking. A prospective climber should look to the three-time Mr Olympia who inspired the project name for inspiration: get on the supplements, burn those extra kilos, achieve sub ten per cent bodyfat. Only a finger-wrestling lightweight can take this title.

Alec McCallum attempts *Frank Zane*. ISAAC BUCKLEY

THE VATICAN

THE VATICAN V13

THE VATICAN CITY is the smallest country in the world. *The Vatican* (boulder) is more aptly compared to Mother Russia. It's enormous: a monolith of overhanging limestone, standing about ten metres tall. The left arête bulges and oozes, creating some downright religious slopers. A small array of cracks and pockets for the right hand complete this technical, tiring, compression testpiece. Situated in the northern corner of Flock Hill and hidden behind seemingly impenetrable castle walls, *The Vatican* is the perfect example of what makes climbing here uniquely difficult. All day sunlight makes the slopers unholdable without cloud cover. The landing is confusing and dangerous, so multiple spotters and monstrous pads are a must. The top is so narrow and slopey that two perpendicular ropes are needed to safely anchor a top rope. Sieging this holy city will take a small army of pad people.

The Vatican, unlike others on this list, will prove quite a bit easier in terms of the technical rock climbing. Zac Orme and James Morris tried this years ago and allegedly *The Vatican* still haunts their dreams. Years later, it has seen very little attention. This problem is only mentioned in whispers now, slowly becoming a myth. But back in the days of legend, all of the moves but one had gone down, so how hard can it be? Given a lot of top rope rehearsal, prayer and a hideous amount of boulder pads, this will be a path (compared to the other problems on this list).

What dreams are made of. James Morris projecting on *The Vatican*. DEREK THATCHER

THE FREAK SHOW

THE FREAK SHOW V15

SITUATED JUST to the left of *The Big Show* (V11, many claim this is one of the finest boulders in the world), you might think *The Freak Show* would be overshadowed. Luckily, it shares the same impeccably compact, rounded and superbly featured stone. *The Freak Show* is so hard that even pulling your weight onto the wall is not a given. If you're lucky enough to reach the rippling curtain feature, prepare for a truly breathtaking climbing hold. This is Flock Hill sculpture at its finest, superbly hard and dimpled for your enjoyment. No time was wasted by Mother Nature carving a top-out jug. Ascending rock gods must navigate a sloping pod and mantle to reach the victory slab. While the architecture is only gently overhung, most of the holds are quarter-pad crimps or vague changes of angle (not actually holds). Boasting a modest height (six metres, not including the slab) and a great landing, this truly is a test-piece waiting for a brutally strong or obscenely determined climber.

Alec McCallum clinging to the unique geometries on *The Freak Show*. ISAAC BUCKLEY

KING LINE HUNTER

KING LINE HUNTER V15

QUITE POSSIBLY the hardest problem on this list, but don't let that put you off. What a line! Situated in the south-eastern corner of Flock Hill, *King Line Hunter* sits proudly isolated from the dense riff-raff of Flock Hill. This problem really is a regal sculpture in limestone, magnificent in every way and demanding positions completely unattainable to those without genetic gifts. The rock is a limestone enthusiast's wet dream, with not a sharp hold in sight. The slopers guarding the lip are reminiscent of *Trifecta Middle*—vertical textured patches of rock—washed out of sheer enthusiasm for there being a hold in that location. Only the antihydral-obsessed or genetically-gifted gecko skinners can grip these slopes. The crux undercling would break most climber's pulleys, yet is remarkably comfortable (unlike those nasty 'tins' in Switzerland). This climb's apparent impossibility is its appeal. You must defy reason and surge blindly forward, toothbrush in hand; if it can be washed, it can be climbed!

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Climbing at Castle Hill has always been uniquely difficult. Before the invention of toothbrushes and water, slapping up dusty slabs on carrots was the living end of hard (trust me, I've tried it so you don't have to). To this day, climbing V9 at Quantum Field can feel like a moment of climbing excellence—even for an elite boulderer. The prospect of climbing V15 on this kind of terrain is a ridiculously daunting task. Taking down one of these projects will be a lifetime achievement. Obvious candidates are the climbing elite from overseas, but we don't let them into New Zealand anymore, so for now the locals have the stage. Young and enthusiastic talent is essential, so Alec McCallum comes to mind, as does young Tom Waldin and his gecko skin. Erica Gatland has the fingers for *Frank Zane* and anyone brave enough has a shot at *The Vatican*. If Wiz Fineron and Matt Corbishley ever get off their surfboards, they're primed for success. But the key attribute will be that unique obsession with our limestone. This kind of difficulty will take time, patience and blind optimism. 'The perfect day, the perfect skin and just the right amount of luck' is the Castle Hill boulderer's mantra. C

Tom Waldin eyeing up the crux undercling on *King Line Hunter*.
ISAAC BUCKLEY

A CLOSE CALL ON THE OTIRA FACE, MT ROLLESTON

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY **PATRICK CLISSOLD**

Time slowed down. I felt disconnected, like I was watching what was unfolding on a television. I hadn't even noticed that I'd cut my hand and there was blood pouring from it. All I could see was the microwave-sized rock as it bounced down the buttress towards two worried faces looking straight up at me. The trajectory was obvious. It was going to hit her head. It was going to hit her straight in the head, and there was nothing I could do about it. Then there was the scream. Everything came back into focus.

The day started normally enough for a day in the mountains—early. Well, not for everyone. I had hiked up to the Otira valley, in Arthur's Pass, the night before and bivvied near the bottom of the Otira face of Mt Rolleston. Rockfall was always on my mind as it was late summer, so I found a bivvy spot under a large boulder—but still had a perfect view of the starry night.

Three others met me the next morning at about 8am and, after stashing my overnight gear under a rock, we headed up the scree slope in front of us to access the route we were attempting: the Otira Face Direct. This is a fairly well-trodden route, which ascends a prominent buttress almost to the summit of the High Peak of Mt Rolleston. This was not the first time I had attempted it. I tried it last winter, but had to abandon the attempt when the sun hit the face and melted out larger and larger rocks, which bombarded us on the very scree slopes we were now on. Nothing today, though. In fact, I hadn't heard any rockfall all night.

Relief on the walk out.

After some interesting route-finding, we found our way to the permanent snow field about halfway up the face. This is the start of the 900m buttress of greywacke—a rock not known for solidness, but the route looked solid enough. There were four of us, so we decided to split into two ropes of two and head up the route with about ten minutes in between us. We decided not to rope up to begin with, as the route looked more like scrambling and time was a factor with a big day ahead of us. Once we topped out, we would have to traverse from High Peak to Middle Peak, then to Low Peak and the Otira slide descent. To pitch the whole thing would take more time than there was in the day.

The first hour of climbing was great. The rock was solid, the climbing fun and the exposure and scenery were mind-blowing—exactly what you go alpine rock climbing for. Constant in my mind was the risk of climbers hitting rocks down on each other, so some deliberate, careful foot placements were needed. We came to an awesome-looking body-width crack, which was great to thrutch up and was made especially spicy with a rucksack on. At this point we couldn't move together, which meant we all bunched up on a small ledge while waiting our turn. I was second up and it turned out to be a great pitch. Again, we didn't feel the need to be roped up as the climbing was pretty relaxed. Above the pitch, I stopped for a breath and found a band of rock that had turned to rubble with some pretty big blocks all stacked atop each other. We were expecting this, and just as I was making a mental note to take extra care, I felt a block at my shoulder move and bash down my side. I screamed as loud as I could as a warning to those below.

Just before the rock reached my friend, providence intervened and it ricocheted off another larger rock, bouncing away in a different direction and just missing her. This larger rock, however, now dislodged, rolled a few metres down and hit her straight on the top of the head before falling off into the abyss. Luckily it had not had time to build up momentum, and with great strength she managed to stay on the ledge and didn't follow the rock to the bottom of the valley. Everyone was in complete shock at what had happened. My partner ahead of me, who couldn't see what was going on, had thought I had fallen due to my warning cry. I thought I had severely injured my friend, and she was distraught from her near-death experience. The fourth member of the team, who was her partner, seemed to have the coolest head and immediately attended to her and got her into a position away from any other falling rocks. It was then I saw the large, bloody handprint I had left.

Greywacke can be very sharp, so sharp that it cut me like a scalpel on my wrist, just above my artery and pretty deep. I realised how lucky I had also been. It would need stitches, but that would have to wait. Her head had no obvious injuries. The helmet had taken the impact like it was designed to and had nearly cracked in two. She had all of her faculties and no sign of neck injury. We had to make a choice: to rappel down and bail on the route or keep going. Weighing up the risks of rockfall and rappelling from where we were, we decided that the best thing would be to continue the route, but leave a much larger space between us. Once we were off the buttress and on the ridge proper, there would be less risk of hitting each other with rocks.

My partner and I carried on, still shaken, but we soon got our heads back in the game. I had managed to fashion a compression bandage out of a camera lens bag and a glove, which stopped the bleeding and allowed me to climb pretty much as normal. The adrenaline kept any pain at bay. The route tops out at the Philistine–Rolleston ridge, and then follows the ridge to the summit of Mt Rolleston High Peak. This whole ridge is a pile of large, badly stacked blocks, but easy enough as long as you walk gingerly. We joked about what would happen if there was even a small quake whilst we were on it. Best not think about it.

We finally reached the top with great relief and were rewarded with a stunning view over the Southern Alps and the Crow Glacier below us. This was why we did this stuff, for the pure exhilaration of being in these places. In true Victorian mountaineering style, we stopped and got out some tea and sandwiches, not just because we were hungry, but also because we had not seen the other pair since leaving them and we were getting a little nervous. Eventually, we saw them top out onto the Philistine–Rolleston ridge and a great relief flowed over us. However, we were only halfway, and there was still a lot of pretty technical ground to get down.

The Otira Face at dawn.

From High Peak, the route has a few options. Ultimately you are trying to get to Low Peak and descend via the Goldney Ridge and Otira Slide. The safest option is to rappel off High Peak onto the Crow Glacier where you can walk across to Low Peak with relative ease. However, this involves carrying ice gear, which we had decided against. The other option is to rap down to the precarious notch between High and Middle Peaks, and then sidle Middle Peak and then on to Low Peak. This involves some interesting route-finding through some of the best choss Arthur's Pass has to offer, but with deliberate and careful footing it was soon over. It was at this point that we noticed a helicopter making quite an obvious search pattern of the Otira Face in the valley below us. We hadn't made a call and we didn't set off a PLB. It couldn't be for us, could it?

After Low Peak, it is a steep but steady descent to the Goldney Ridge on loose rock and scree. This felt like a breeze after the careful footing required for the rest of the route, and we got our scree running groove on and made a quick descent. The helicopter even flew fairly low over us at this point, and we waved. The ridge itself is pretty narrow at the point you join it, and pretty exposed on either side. As a Welshman, it reminded me of Crib Coch if someone had made it out of a loose, dry stone wall.

Not much later, we got to the top of the Otira Slide where the scree running begins proper. However, even here I had a close call. There's no problem where the scree is deep, but you have to make some traverses to avoid bluffs. I nearly went into an uncontrollable slide on a bare patch above one of the bluffs. It is the same as hitting an ice patch when powder skiing. It was a stark reminder that you should never really let your guard down until you're back at the car.

The other two caught up and it was the first time I'd spoken to my friend since the rock incident. I had an incredible sense of guilt. I'd nearly killed her. It was my carelessness that caused it. All I could do was give her a big bear hug and say 'sorry', and I really meant it. She was understanding and didn't assign any blame, but the feeling of guilt remains with me. We all walked back to the car together, glad that it was over and nursing our wounds.

ABOVE The author climbing on the Otira Face. OLLIE EDWARDS

NEXT PAGE The author climbing from the Philistine - Rolleston Ridge to Mt Rolleston's High Peak. OLLIE EDWARDS

At the car park, we saw that Arthur's Pass SAR had left notes on all our cars, and it dawned on us that the helicopter was indeed looking for us. We dashed to phone signal and rang them to tell them we were okay. Apparently a group of walkers (who I later managed to get in contact with) going up the Otira valley had heard the screaming high up on the face and a 'very large' rockfall, which had obviously been triggered by the rock I dislodged. They assumed they had just witnessed a fatality and rang SAR. The helicopter had actually been a Police helicopter and not a SAR one, which we later learned had not even spotted us, despite flying right over our heads as we waved.

So what was the aftermath? Well, I had to get my hand fixed and my friend was left with whiplash, concussion and a broken helmet. However it could've been so much worse, and as usual when things like this happen, I wrote down the lessons I had learned and what I would do differently, and even what I wouldn't change:

-The group was too large. It is really hard to manage rockfall on loose faces like those in Arthur's Pass with more than two people. With two, one can stay in a safe spot whilst the other moves, but this is not really easy to do with more people. With these routes in particular, even if there were only two of us, I would walk away and do something else if I knew there was another group on the route ahead.

-Wear a helmet. This isn't really a lesson learnt. We all wore a helmet and we all do even at sport crags, all the time. In this instance, it really did save a life.

-This is a well-trodden and relatively 'easy' route. There has even been some speed climbing races up it. I am loathe to give absolutes or tell people what to do, and I won't here. But on this type of face, with the looseness of most New Zealand rock, there is a real risk of that going very wrong, very quickly.

-To rope up or not to rope up? We were all well within our comfort zone. However, the benefits of roping up are obvious if you get hit by a rock. There are a lot of cons, including having the time to finish the route in the light. Simul-climbing would probably be the best compromise, but we would have to be slick.

-Have more than one basic first aid kit. The only first aid kit we had was in the second party, and I really needed to bandage my hand up. I usually carry an Israeli Bandage, which is a type of wound dressing used in the military. The one time I forgot it was the one time I really needed it.

The day was massively enjoyable apart from about ten minutes of it. Had my shoulder not touched the wrong rock at the wrong time, there would be no story to tell, no injuries and no helicopter call out. It would have just been another day in the mountains. The butterfly effect is alive and well in NZ mountaineering.

A NEW CLIMBING PARTNER

BY NICK ATKINSON

The author near Dennistoun Pass with Mt Shyness prominent beyond. FINN SCHOLES

It can be hard to calm down after playing a good gig. If you go to bed before midnight, you'll just lie awake with your wheels still spinning. Half the band had come back to mine after this particular show, as I had the place to myself. I was cooking up some pasta while we listened to a few records quietly. Finn's ears were especially sensitive, as he'd given them a hard time lately while playing his organ at welding volume for hours on end. He even found the sizzle of thin slices of sausage in a pan uncomfortable. Though we'd known each other for a good few years, this was the first time he'd been over. A naturally observant and curious soul, he soon spotted my collection of ice axes hanging on a window sill behind my keyboards. He asked me when I'd last used them. I told him about a few trips some years back and went on to mention I had no pending plans to dust them off. That led Finn to bluntly ask why I didn't climb anymore? I was stumped. He has a knack of wielding simple questions, effortlessly cutting to the core of big issues. As I had no answer, there was clearly no reason. To the hills we must go at once! As if the excitement of our concert wasn't enough, now my imagination unexpectedly unfurled, filled anew with the prospect of untrodden snows.

At that time, Finn had scant experience in the mountains aside from walking the Heaphy Track in trainers. He'd suffered from his inadequate footwear on that trip, so we got to work finding him a good pair of boots. Other than that, he didn't need much new gear as I could lend him an ice axe, crampons and a decent down sleeping bag. As with musical endeavours, I found it extraordinary what plans could quickly grow from the tiniest kernel of encouragement. Soon we had a trip mapped out and tickets booked for flights from Auckland to Hokitika. While Finn hadn't done any climbing as such, I had good reason to believe he'd be a natural on precarious terrain. It is instructive to see him on stage performing with his quintet, Carnivorous Plant Society. His balance is exceptional. He can hoist up a full-sized orchestral tuba while playing a lick with double mal-

Finn Scholes approaching Seddon Col from Stag Creek. NICK ATKINSON

Finn Scholes on the summit of The Gladiator. NICK ATKINSON

lets on his vibraphone. His trumpet is often jammed between his thighs while he battles with the drawbars and keys of his vintage organ. He can then bring the trumpet urgently to his lips with his left hand, hitting stratospherically high notes while still thumping a bass line with his right hand on the keyboard. I could imagine he wouldn't be troubled by steep, slippery snow-grass or giant, mossy boulders.

I'd done most of my mountaineering alone. I confess I enjoyed it that way, though my ardour for going solo cooled over time. While most of those trips ventured into some of the remoter corners of Mt Aspiring National Park, I'd also explored a good portion of the main divide during a 17-day mission from Makarora River to the Mount Cook Road below Jamieson Saddle. In my fitter days, I'd climbed Mt Dechen approaching from the west up the Mahitahi valley before climbing a spur above Edison Creek. On that occasion, I'd taken the trouble to start from the beach at Bruce Bay to make a complete job of it. Shipton and Tilman sometimes mentioned they preferred crossing a pass over summiting a peak. That gave as good excuse as any for me to forgo summiting mountains while traversing as much rarely-visited alpine country as possible.

My time in the Southern Alps prepared me for jaunts in Tierra del Fuego and Patagonia—though in truth what little mountaineering took place that season merely punctuated the sailing and cycling. The yachting eventually led me to South Georgia, where I spent a considerable amount of time over three summers mostly working for the legendary sailing couple Tim and Pauline Carr at the Grytviken Whaling Museum. Though I made no ascents of note, we began, with practice, to move freely over mountain tops that appeared grand, but on closer inspection were often teetering piles of rubble. The New Zealander felt very much at home.

But I hadn't been into the mountains since bottling it on exposed tussock slopes beyond Pearson Saddle during an overly ambitious solo trip some years back. I'd hoped to make it up

TOP Finn Scholes plays the pocket trumpet on Seddon Col.
NICK ATKINSON

BOTTOM Nick and Finn in Eric Stream after descending from Dennistoun Pass.
NICK ATKINSON

Donald River and the western approaches to Mt Pollux, a route since pioneered by the evergreen Nina Dickerhof and company. I'd successfully crossed Pearson Saddle in to the Waitoto in my 20s, but I didn't have the hunger for it in my late 30s. Now in my early 40s, I was fired up anew. Thanks to Finn, I saw the peaks as he did, and through fresh eyes the summits sparkled.

I can't remember how I came across the Remote Huts website, but it got bookmarked immediately, then trawled through relentlessly. I'd relied on a tent for shelter during most of my mountain trips, but the website made me realise that Finn and I could stitch together good stretches of untrammelled country while leaving the tent at home. Naively, I imagined for the most part that the main divide north of Aoraki Mount Cook wouldn't be quite so grand and challenging as the country to the south. It was a wonderful surprise to be routinely awestruck during nine wonderful days in mountains behind Hokitika and Ross.

Unfortunately, Finn's first southern summit was traversed in a blizzard atop point 2084m, as we climbed out of the Tuke valley towards the slopes above Ivory Lake. We then crossed Seddon Col, and Finn later told me how curious it was to see me dive headlong into sub-alpine scrub as we searched for the bivvy rock near Seddon Creek. Then it was my turn for a shock. It took us eight hours of horrendous going over scrubby boulders to get to the confluence of the Wilkinson and Whitcombe Rivers.

His wonderment rekindled my fire, and now we head to the Southern Alps for a nine- or ten-day trip at least every year. We made it to Harpers Rock in 2018, where we spent a memorable two days stumbling around the flats above the Douglas Glacier in slack-jawed amazement. Last spring, we completed a classic west-to-east crossing of the main divide at Dennistoun Pass, during which we broke in a new tent fly—a purchase inspired by Danilo Hegg's wonderful Southern Alps Photography blog.

Now I open up the topomap page most nights, zooming in to scour the Main Divide for remote lakes and hidden icefalls—knowing that my bandmate Finn will always be up for a fresh mission. A friendship is such a precious thing, and it's not every day you find a new one.

STEVE EASTWOOD

SNOW SAFETY TIPS FOR WINTER

BY WILL ROWNTREE

Winter is coming. Even though 5G-weaponised bats are threatening to take over the economy, the world is still turning and the snow will still fall. With a bit of luck, Murphy's Law will be in full effect and we'll have a belter of a season. Hopefully, the following will help you to make good decisions and have a good time this winter when out in the hills.

When moving through avalanche terrain, we want to gather as much information as possible. The more info we have, the better we can make decisions. Gathering this information can take time, and as human beings who are excited to ski and climb, we cut corners to get to our objectives faster without even realising we are doing so. If we learn how to gather the info we need efficiently and in the right manner, we can improve our decision-making as well as our safety, while at the same time move quickly through the mountains.

These are some quick tips for gathering the relevant information while you are on the move, targeted at people who already have at least an intermediate level of experience and avalanche education. Remember that formal courses and education combined with regular practice and good mentorship is the best way to live a long and happy life in the avalanche world.

DIGGING PITS:

Digging pits and doing instability tests is what we mostly associate with gathering this useful information. Doing so gives us a view into the snowpack and allows us to see how the snow is behaving. It is important to have an idea in your head about what you are likely to see and find (because of course you have done your research and at least read the regional forecast). Get into the habit of testing yourself. Try and come up with an educated idea of what you are going to find before you look. Taking the next step of digging is to confirm or deny these ideas. Try and avoid just digging anywhere and remember the key prerequisites when picking a site. It must be safe. There's no sense in getting avalanched while trying to find out if the slope is going to avalanche. If you must, dig your pit directly on the slope in question. Have a

ABOVE **Digging** pits in the Craigieburn Range. Pits are a primary source of snowpack information, but can be supplemented by the informal methods described.
STEVE EASTWOOD

good think about it first. Make sure someone is ready and watching, and it doesn't hurt to set up a quick belay while digging in high consequence terrain. Also, your pit needs to be representative. Always try and get something on roughly the same aspect, angle and elevation as the slope you would like to ski. Avoid obviously scoured or heavily loaded slopes. Practice and establish systems for actually digging and doing tests. Marking out or knowing where 30cm is on your saw is handy, as is making 10cm increment marks on your ski pole. The faster you can do the heavy labour, the quicker you can get on with what you want to do. Finally, it is important to remember that digging a pit does give us really good information—but only for that particular area. Often people dig once and then 'call it good' for the day, despite changing aspects and elevations regularly. Be conscious of significant changes in terrain.

QUICK TIPS:

There are many more 'informal' ways of gathering data that do not require stopping for very long. We know that digging a pit is especially useful, but if we dig on every new slope we get to, our progress will be less than optimal. The following techniques are used by many avalanche professionals and experienced backcountry practitioners to get quick info.

Pole probing. One of the classics is flipping your ski pole upside down and stabbing it into the snow. This allows us to get a good feel into the upper snowpack with little effort. One main reason I do this is to feel for 'hollow' snow. Dense slabs of overlying soft snow is often an indicator of instability. The other reason is to just feel the overall structure. When dealing with layer(s) of concern, I want to know where they are and their depth. I have a good idea about the snowpack already because of prior digging, and now I can confirm quickly with my ski pole if the structure is the same or changing. Something doesn't feel right? Maybe time to investigate.

Hand shears. Quick and easy to interpret, the hand shear should become your go-to. There's no excuse for not doing them regularly throughout the day. Using either your hand or ski pole, cut an approximate 30cm-by-30cm block down to your layer in question. Take the time to isolate the column and get all the way down the backside with one or two hands. It is important that you apply force as evenly as possible from the bottom to top so you don't 'lever' the block. Begin with a light push and try to gradually increase it until you see a result. Not what you expected? Move to a formal test to get a better idea of what is going on.

Isolating areas of snow. On the uphill especially, it is easy to quickly isolate an area of snow between two skin tracks without any need to stop. The person behind moves above the existing skin track and can even jump up and down. This can indicate how the snow will behave if a slope is unsupported—for example, a slope that ends in a drop off rather than a nice gradual transition from a steep to low angle.

Finally, try and bring your awareness to a Buddhist Monk level. As we already know, sudden changes in the weather can rapidly affect the snowpack around us. Things like rapid warming and changes in wind speed and direction are especially important, and can sometimes get missed with everything else that is going on. Developing this awareness does take time and practice to become subconscious. Try getting into the habit of regularly asking yourself, 'What am I feeling and seeing in regard to the weather? Has something changed? Does it align with the weather forecast?' Maybe time to change your plans.

These are all just informal tools in a skill set that needs constant maintenance. The above descriptions are brief and designed to point you in the right direction, rather than to provide hard and fast rules. They allow us to confirm or deny ideas we already have about what is happening in the snow. If uncertainty exists, then formal tests should be the fallback option to help make better decisions.

There are other slightly more advanced methods, such as ski cutting slopes and test slopes as well as kicking cornices. These require a higher level of skill due to the potential consequences, and if you're unsure about anything, seek mentorship and further education. The learning should never stop.

Enjoy getting out there this winter and putting some of these techniques into practice.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

BY PAUL ROGERS

Cathartic: *Providing psychological relief through the open expression of strong emotions.*

When retreating down a climb in the mountains, there's so much going on that requires your immediate attention—like avoiding rock fall and finding the next anchor station—that any concern about how you have joined the rope together needs to be sorted beforehand.

1982. During my formative years as a traditional rock climber and closet mountaineer, I used a double fisherman's knot to join two ropes on long 'retrievable' rappels. During this time, I had countless issues trying to pull the rope without the knot jamming in a groove, crack or stopping on a sharp edge. These difficulties appeared to plague us all in the alps, at crags and on the ice routes of Scotland.

Sadly, a jammed rope eventually triggered a more serious situation. While finishing an epic retreat down the North Face of the Petit Dru, our rope snagged on the last rappel. I stopped at the bergschrund to belay my partner back up the rope so he could free the double fisherman's. This was the worst place to spend any extra time, as we were sitting ducks from stone-fall hazard emanating from the Dru Couloir. Sure enough, out of the low claggy cloud came a shower of stones. I escaped injury by diving into the 'schrund. A fellow climber who had teamed up with us for the retreat wasn't so lucky. He was killed instantly.

Six years later, in Pakistan, the double fisherman's again triggered an epic for Nick Cradock, Guy Cotter and myself while descending Uli Biaho in heavy snowfall. Our desire to escape the storm saw us abandon our jammed double 55m ropes and commit to using our 50m haul line. Being reduced to 25m rappels forced us to use more equipment to build anchors. From memory, it took 18 anchors to reach the relative safety of the snow gully. Some of our anchors would have cost up to $100 each, while others were as cheap as a loop of tat. At least we had no drama retrieving the rope and there were no fisherman's to consider. I'm sure these were not the only epics to cause dramas for climbers in the '80s, but the double fisherman's knot remained at the centre of these epics.

ABOVE Everybody loves a good abseil. Rose Pearson and Gemma Wilson of the New Zealand Alpine Team in Yosemite. JAZ MORRIS

1990. Back in New Zealand, while recounting this incident to a mate, I was shown the offset overhand knot as an alternative. What a winner! This knot sits up proud when pulling it down and slips easily over sharp edges. In the '90s, I came out of the closet as an alpinist and became a professional guide. When the new millennium came about, I started working in Canada. It was here the term European Death Knot was first mooted, probably in response to the American Death Triangle, a common term for some dodgy piton anchor configuration at the time.

Over the years, different guiding companies would encourage us to add a second knot to the over hand. Figure eight and figure nine options were also suggested. I found the whole debate more based on fear and ignorance. Adopting the offset overhand knot was the single most effective way of preventing rope retrieval problems while on a multi-pitch descent. So why the unflattering name European Death knot? It seems to have emerged from the way the knot fails under load. In all fairness, I was a little uncomfortable with the way it looked when I first used one, as it appears to want to pull apart. On a recent trip to the good folk at Aspiring Safety, I got into a debate about the double fisherman's versus offset overhand for joining two ropes.

Instead of resorting to YouTube, we took some 8mm dynamic rope, tied one of each of the knots and put them in their testing cabinet. Indeed, the offset overhand first tightened at 6kn, began to pull through at 10kn and totally unravelled at 13.5kn. One person abseiling would represent no more that 1kn. The double fisherman's went into the cabinet and slowly got smaller and smaller till the rope actually snapped at the knot at 20kn. I had to explain to the tester that performance trumps breaking strain in my world and that the double overhand remains the overall winner for me. The most important part is its ability to not snag when trying to retrieve the ropes for the next abseil. I pointed out that I could never put a 6kn load on to an abseil.

My first eight years as a trad climber were plagued with jammed ropes, but my last 30 years have been almost snag free. Of course, a lot of this can be put down to the proliferation of well-placed bolted belay rings, but the real hero has been the European Death Knot. So what's in a name?

Please note that I'm a strong advocate of using compatible double rope techniques as a trad climber. The use of single ropes for climbing and a tag line for long rappels is a little more complex. You can gain good insight into this complexity by researching 'European death knot' online. At the end of the day, it's a judgement call and only yours to make. Good luck out there.

MOUNTAIN EQUIPMENT CITADEL BELAY JACKET

IT SEEMS like the older I get, the warmer my belay jacket needs to be. I shiver just thinking about the thin, synthetic jacket with a terrible, zip-off hood that was my first belay jacket. Barely warm enough to function as a summer weight jacket, it was my only insulated jacket for my first four years or so of climbing. As the years went by, it seemed like every five years or so I got a bigger and warmer belay jacket. With almost eight years on my current belay jacket, I felt like it was time for an upgrade.

I've always been a big fan of the nearly-foolproof warmth and durability of a synthetic belay jacket. I do have down jackets, including Macpac's Equinox NZAT parka from a few years ago and a lighter Rab Microlight jacket. But they are either too warm and/or not durable enough for most winter climbing. A synthetic jacket, while generally heavier than the equivalent warmth of a down jacket and less compressible, is fairly foolproof. It will keep you warm(ish), even if you get totally drenched, and if you rip a hole in it while grovelling up (or down) some chimney, you won't be leaking insulation all over the place.

Mountain Equipment's Citadel Jacket is one of the heaviest (and warmest) synthetic belay jackets on the market and has been for many years. It is warmer and significantly heavier than Patagonia's popular DAS (due for a redesign next year), Rab's Photon Pro and Black Diamond's Stance parka, all of which hover around the 600-700g mark. At 885g, the Citadel is a bastion of warmth, a veritable fortress of insulation. Recently updated to use Primaloft Gold insulation, resulting in a small loss of weight, the rest of the already-dialled-in design has only been tweaked slightly. There are two very large chest pockets, two hand pockets, a dual sliding zip (with a snap closure to keep the bottom zipper pull from creeping up), a deep and fully insulated hood and a pair of internal mesh pockets. Most of this is standard for any top-of-the-line belay jacket. Internally, the jacket is stitched with something called EXL, which looks almost like the baffles—the pockets of space—that you'd see on a down jacket. This is elasticised stitching to snug the body of the jacket and the hood close to you, eliminating dead space and feeling like a nice, warm hug. The hood is very deep, with a wired brim and all the normal size/volume adjustments. The Citadel also compresses down extremely well for its size and weight. I've been impressed that it is only marginally bigger than my previous (200g lighter) belay jacket.

And now to the nitty-gritty—performance. This is the best belay jacket I have ever used. For very cold conditions—damp or otherwise—this is the jacket I have been reaching for and expect to continue to reach for in years to come. There are things I don't like about it, of course. The internal mesh pockets are too small to comfortably fit my warm gloves (currently using BD Guide gloves), and I feel there are too many (four) external pockets, which are too large. The external pockets are also positioned on top of one another, reducing the usable space of the pockets. The snap at the bottom of the zip is so low profile that it is hard to snap shut with gloves or mitts on, but it is a necessary feature because the zip does actually ride up when I've forgotten to snap it closed.

Looking at other reviews on the internet (there aren't many), one reviewer had some serious concerns about durability. I have had no such concerns and do not expect to. Despite a winter of use, it still looks brand new. Mountain Equipment could easily lose 50 or 60g with some simplification of the design, but overall, for someone looking for a very warm, no-compromises belay jacket, this is currently the best one on the market.

A note on sizing—I am almost always a men's size medium and this jacket this is no exception. I tried on a few other Mountain Equipment jackets (but not the Citadel) and found medium to be just about right. However the belay parka cut of the Citadel is a very big medium, sized to fit over everything you're already wearing. If you are in between sizes normally, I would recommend sizing down.

Mountain Equipment Citadel. RRP US$350 ★★★★★

–Graham Johnson

MACPAC NZAT HYPERDRY DOWN QUILT 350 SLEEPING BAG

CLIMBERS HAVE been experimenting with quilt-type sleeping systems for many years. I first heard about down quilts when Ed Viesturs wrote about sleeping under one with his partner Veikka Gustafsson while climbing Dhaulagiri in the late '90s. Since then, they have popped up in stories, mostly from sponsored climbers mentioning that such-and-such a manufacturer had made them a one-off special for some special mission. Ultralight trampers have also been using quilt-type systems for a long time, but these systems are almost exclusively designed as a one-person system.

Macpac's Down Quilt—designed/insisted upon by the New Zealand Alpine Team—is a sleeping 'system' designed for up to three people. What are the advantages of a quilt versus a sleeping bag? You can get more than one person under it, and the shared warmth (with some spooning) will keep you warmer than each of you in separate sleeping bags of a similar weight, thus lightening the packs while still keeping you comfortable. And if you happen to be in a position where you can't lie down—such as sitting on a little ledge, tied to an anchor—the quilt is so much more adaptable than a sleeping bag and can be wrapped around yourselves. If you are in a tent or a hut, it's also a lot less constricting than a sleeping bag—if you tend to be a restless sleeper. Now, I have been using this for about a year and I have never had two other snuggle buddies with me underneath it. Two in total is about the limit I'd plan for with this, but you could probably have a very uncomfortable night with three, each with a decent share of the quilt covering them.

Macpac's version is very well thought out. It is essentially a baffled duvet (sewn through) with drawcords and toggles to snug the quilt around the occupant(s). It has roughly the same dimensions as a full-sized mattress. There is a removal strap system to help secure the bag around a single occupant and pad, as well as a pretty nifty stuff sack. When using it alone (as I most often do), I usually slide my sleeping pad inside the straps and cinch the toe end tightly for a pretty cosy setup, which I've used in well below freezing conditions. There is no hood or draft collar, but you can easily fashion both of these things from other pieces of clothing you have with you.

If I could make one change, I'd add a full-length 'foot pocket' to the bottom of the bag—even just a single layer of superlight nylon fabric—to keep my feet from poking out the bottom and getting cold when I'm using it as sleeping bag. This wouldn't add much weight, and you could either not use it or cut it out if you didn't want it. The strap and toggle system is a bit fiddly, but I can't think of a better method—this one is extremely lightweight and effective.

And now to touch on the elephant in the room: How warm is it? Macpac wisely does not assign a temperature rating to the quilt, but by way of comparison, one of Macpac's -1°C conventional sleeping bags (the Epic HyperDry 400) has about 400g of 800 fill down. The quilt has 350g of hydrophobic 850 fill down. I'd guess the coldest night I've spent in it was about -5°C and I was cosy (alone), but with a partner our shared body heat could have allowed us to be reasonably comfortable at a much lower temperature. This is a piece of kit I'd carry for three-season alpine trips, hut trips all year round and all but the deepest winter missions. Macpac have recently released a warmer down quilt—the NZAT 700 (not tested), with 700g of down that would be suitable for much colder nights out.

All in all, I've been extremely pleased with it. It also has the added benefit of being able to be used as a duvet on the

couch at home for cosying up with a cup of tea and some gingernuts.

Anecdotally, the primary driver behind the quilt was testing this on a route in the Darrans with another high-profile Kiwi climber. One of these climbers was a quilt-hog and had a very comfortable night, while the other spent the night fighting for a tiny piece and had a miserable night. Choose your snuggle buddies carefully!

Macpac NZAT HyperDRY Down Quilt 350. RRP $500 ★★★★½ –Graham Johnson

SCARPA PHANTOM TECH BOOTS

SOME OF you may remember my generally unfavourable review of La Sportiva's G5 boot last year, where I mourned how Scarpa boots generally didn't fit me. I haven't worn Scarpa boots since the days of the Vega because my narrow, low-volume foot with its low arch is generally too narrow for the Scarpa lasts. And to be honest, I haven't tried Scarpa climbing boots in probably the past ten years. But I got a sneak peak at the new model of Phantom Tech in Ouray in December 2018, and they looked so nice I thought I would have to at least try them on when they became available to the proletariat. Okay, the bougie end of the proletariat.

The new Phantom Tech is built on a different last than the previous generations (the ARC last vas as opposed to the NAG last, if you care). I was surprised to find that not only did the new Phantom Techs fit me, but they actually felt good. I needed to size down from my normal size 43 in La Sportiva to a 42.5 in the Phantom Tech. The boot is a very trim, light and precise-feeling boot—making my G5s and previous Baturas feel heavy and clunky by comparison. The lacing system is simply … laces and eyelets. They've done away with the spiral zip closure and lace hooks of the previous generation in favour of a slightly offset zipper, much like what is found on the La Sportiva boots. Like any good alpine boot, it is completely waterproof and very breathable. It's not a Gore-Tex membrane—it uses something called HDry—but it works perfectly.

As far as climbing goes, this is one of the best on the market. It eats steep ice and mixed terrain for breakfast, lunch, dinner and dessert. They feel so precise, like each foot placement is a surgical strike. They are just stiff enough for long pitches of steep ice, but with a little flex so that they walk well. They have a fairly pronounced rocker in the sole that helps with walking, and the sole is also more robust than the previous generation. The gaiter does not have a drawstring at the top to seal out snow, but it does have some elastic in it that does a fairly good job. They fit well with a variety of crampons—I've been using the G20+, Rambo III Comp (yes, the super old-school ones) and Cassin C12s with no issues. Friends of mine regularly use Petzl and Black Diamond crampons and report no issues.

I do have some concerns about long-term durability. The previous generation had a lot more armoured fabric on the medial aspect of the boot to protect against errant crampon punctures. I've never punctured a gaitered boot, but this might be a concern for a beginner. The rand is always a weak spot on boots like these, and Scarpa has employed some tricky wrapping of the rand which looks cool, but leaves a little exposed 'bump' next to the big toe. I can see this as a starting point for rand delamination, so I have prophylactically sealed this over with seam grip.

The lacing system is the worst part of the boot. I've always hated boots that have eyelets at the ankle instead of lace hooks. I find the hooks are a lot easier to get in and out of without having to re-thread eyelets each time. I also find it hard to isolate tension with this lacing system, as there are no lace-locks, which often feature on other boots. The laces also do not go very far down the foot. For a narrow-footed person like myself, I am often tightening boots all the way down but I cannot do that here. The laces also extend beyond the base of the gaiter, so getting tension all the way down is a pain for gloveless fingers and near impossible with gloves. I've thought about adding a cord-lock toggle as lace-locks and after-market hooks, but I haven't gotten around to it. But these are fairly minor quibbles.

I love these boots. These are the best version of the single-gaitered boot on the market that I've seen. They do everything you want from an alpine boot in a light, comfortable and precise package. They are so good, everyone in the market for new boots should at least try them on. Don't expect another single gaitered boot review from me in the near future—I'll be sticking with these.

Scarpa Phantom Tech. RRP US$700 ★★★★½ –Graham Johnson

THE NORTH FACE SUMMIT L3 DOWN HOODIE JACKET

YOU MIGHT think that one down jacket is much like another. Here at the Home of Climbing, we have a spare down jacket from Ed Hillary's 1953 Everest expedition and, while it is pretty heavy due to the old-school fabric, it is still a jacket stuffed with feathers that I would quite happily wear at the crag if I needed to stay warm (keep an eye out for a future review).

While down is largely still down, fabrics have come quite a long way. The North Face's new Summit L3 Down Hoodie uses a Pertex Quantum GL fabric that is a new standard in the nylon ripstop category for its excellent combination of light weight, softness, strength and windproof qualities. This fabric is woven from incredibly fine ten denier or less yarns, giving a weight of less than 25g/m2. That is really light. It is filled with responsibly-sourced 800-fill down and, while the shiny 'plastic bag' look of the fabric may not be to everyone's taste, it makes for an incredible warmth-to-weight ratio in a jacket.

All insulation pieces rest somewhere on a spectrum of compromise between the factors of weight and warmth. My impression when first picking up the jacket was that it was in the 'lightweight insulation' category, by which I mean the kind of piece you take as a compromise on a 'weight is crucial' mission and perhaps wear under a light shell because it isn't really windproof or warm enough—as opposed to a heavier or bulkier belay jacket. But the Summit Hoodie quickly showed itself to be warmer than garments of similar weight that I have used previously. Its lack of weight and impressive packability mean it is possible to be a bit warmer in situations where I would often be left shivering without my plushest belay downie. I was pleasantly surprised to find that it doesn't fit into the 'lightweight insulation' category, not because it is too heavy, but because it is as warm as all but the most warmth-targeted jackets I've used previously.

Given that the same fabric technology can be found in garments from Rab, Berghaus, Macpac and others, what makes this particular jacket a good option? When looking at jackets with equivalent technology and price, with cut being entirely personal (I found the 'slim fit' of this jacket to be comfortable and functional), the difference really comes down to features. I've been impressed with the features implemented by The North Face in this jacket. It has a generous hood that will fit over a helmet, but also has enough drawcord adjustment to be practical for use without one. The pockets are in the right places, a mini stuff sack is included, and one of the pockets has a built-in mesh compartment for separating things like keys so they don't fall out in the snow when you extract your gloves or hat. It has stretch knit cuffs that mean you avoid nasty, cold drafts around the wrists, as well as the unpleasant nylon-on-skin sensation of jackets that don't use different material for their cuffs. It was only when I started using this jacket that I realised that the cuffs on my previous jackets have been annoying me for years. This might actually be my favourite feature of the jacket. Maybe cuffs aren't a significant enough part of a down jacket for this to be a deciding factor, but where fabrics and the down itself are largely equivalent between brands, and at this kind of price, you may as well have some nice cuffs. I'd also accept wrist gaiters with thumb loops.

Is The North Face Summit L3 Hoodie warm enough to serve as your only winter insulation jacket? I'm not quite sure yet. I'd probably call it a three and a half season piece. For some people I know it would be warm enough right through winter, but those are the type of people who could also benefit from changing out of their shorts if they are feeling the chill. Indeed, the jacket is probably warm enough that if you are wearing it and feeling the cold, chances are you are losing heat from another part of your body and would be better off making improvements there, rather than just going for a heavier jacket. For myself, if I thought it was going to be top shelf winter nasty, I'd still take a heavier jacket. But I'd probably still be cold. For all but the coldest months of winter, this jacket would be easily warm enough and certainly lighter than previous options I've used as a three season downie. When it comes to insulation garments, you are often forced into compromising on either warmth or weight. With this jacket you'll feel compromised less often.

The North Face Summit L3 Hoodie. RRP $650 ★★★★ –Tom Hoyle

PULLING WOOD

BY KEITH RILEY

It's not common for the gods to come together and offer gifts for mortals. In Hokitika, Tane Mahuta and Tangaroa work tirelessly, offering up climbing holds for the needy: expertly crafted hardwood nuggets, smoothed, worn and beaten to the finest standards. Sliced in twain with a rusty handsaw, these offerings plaster West Coast bouldering walls. Polished with human oils and dusted with magnesium carbonate, they demand contact strength and accurately-placed fingers to milk their supportive subtleties.

Their journey to these walls is unknown, but presumed: a kereru's digestive tract, centuries on the banks of a Westland river, a class five white water descent, a period of turbulent submergence on the ocean floor before finally being delivered to my doorstep and their final resting place, screwed to a sheet of 18mm plywood.

Amongst climbing jargon is the term 'pulling plastic'. Fond reference to climbing at modern bouldering gyms where the holds are made from some petroleum-based solid derivative. The jargon interchanges poorly with wooden holds. Asking my mates to come round and 'pull wood' has not expanded my pool of climbing partners.

Jargon aside, this does highlight the lack of importance placed on the hold medium. Rock, plastic, wood … granite, limestone, basalt—climbers seem less interested in the medium and more interested in the movement, the environment, the progress, the problem, the camaraderie. Whatever gets you going. The medium is like ice cream flavour. No doubt you have a preference, but ice cream is ice cream.

ABOVE The author on *Eucalypt's Blood* (V16) at Hokitika's inner city, riverside bouldering destination. Tree grades convert to boulder grades by subtracting 16.

RIGHT Maani Riley catching the final jug on the endurance testpiece *Nitens Shining Armour*.

Hokitika, other than a few bouldering walls, is devoid of climbing. Or so I thought. The rock that exists is perched above hard whitewater, buried under a rainforest, or elevated 1500m above sea level. But climbing does not require rock. The medium is just a preference, not a necessity.

With the virtues of climbing on recycled wood proven on my home wall, the next obvious step was live wood … trees.

Like any new boulder, the chosen problem needs a little clean. Get rid of the choss. Dead branches, twigs, anything non-supportive should go, pruned right back to the base. Key holds come right after a bit of mileage. Lichen and flaky bark polish up to provide variable friction, depending on the species. Old man pine can be crimpy as hell. Eucalyptus is smooth and slopey. Kahikatea has shallow pockets. Totara is loose and flaky, but with bold lines.

Some of the more exotic species are often associated with professional grounds-keepers that smooth and mow your landing, remove any 'rock fall', clean the toilets, sweep the access. Podocarp forests tend to be tall, the climbing features dangerously high above the forest floor. Beech (*nothofagus*) is lower, with features closer to moss-cushioned landings. As a general rule, a tree in the open grows out, and a tree in the forest grows up. In the open, a tree is conditioned to the elements—wind strengthens the wide-spanning branches, enabling them to better support climbers at their extremities.

Tree climbing really comes into its own when you get on the steeper lines, the underside. Climbing the features (branches) from beneath can be super pumpy. Outrageous compression moves, explosive throws, heel hooks, knee bars. Committing to 'under side only' opens up a world of steep tufa climbing. An organic Kalymnos.

Paste yourself to the underside of the barrel-wide branch of a walnut tree, where you have to eke out every bit of friction with your inner thighs because the feet are so poor. Unweighting either hand kills any equilibrium you've established with gravity. But you can squeeze just enough to generate upward momentum. At the expense of compression, you throw with one arm. Immediately, your other three limbs cut loose and your body begins to pendulum. At full extension, your driving hand just has time to catch a hole left by a decaying stick, reining and re-plastering 80kgs of swinging meat. Now the pocket offers much more support, but the next hold looks distant. Other than the 'decaying stick' and the 'walnut' bit, this sounds like rock climbing.

So, you've worked the moves, got the problem dialled, done a few repeats. Six months later, you're back for another round. But it's all changed. The route physically evolves. Unlike boulders, these lines grow, the moves get bigger, the exposure increases, holds develop for better or worse. Redpoints have a used-by date depending on the growth rate.

The ethics of pulling wood are fairly self-managing. Cleaning is okay, chipping is not. Improving holds through overzealous cleaning often results in blood. The tree bleeds and oozing sap fills the enhanced hold, negating any advantage your chisel may have provided.

Top roping and leading is fairly uncommon among the wood-pullers. But it's possible. Bolting is frowned upon, as threads and bollards offer plentiful protection.

Spend time exploring a tree and you'll quickly appreciate that it is an entire ecosystem on one trunk. Birds, bugs and fungus live here and you need to appreciate their space. One should move respectfully and enjoy being a visitor. Should you subscribe to the theory of evolution, this was once your home too. Turn off the 'Reel Rock' film and turn on 'Our Planet' to get inspired by primates effortlessly sending bold lines. Like hunting, fishing and farming, tree climbing is in our genes. It is tribal. It is the true origin of rock climbing.

Nowadays, tree climbing is for the arborist and the kids. Some time around puberty, climbing trees lost its appeal. Tree climbing features pretty low on the 'cool things for teenagers to be good at' continuum, so we drop the wood medium for the rock and plastic. Suddenly it's a legitimate pastime, a recognised sport with a club and a culture. Somewhat more acceptable than the wood-pulling underbelly.

So, like your favourite boulder, find a tree, move around it, look for the features, look for the lines, clean the holds, smooth the landing. Locations, soaring lines, movement. It's fringe, but emerging. Pulling wood in public is okay…ish. Be proud. You just might find Fontainebleau in Hagley Park.


LEE HOWELL/ UPRISING

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

Auckland

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

Northen Rocks

10% discount to NZAC members with I.D.

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

Rockup Mobile Rockclimbing Wall

10% discount to NZAC members.

Climbing wall hire. See website and contact them for details and options available. Contact: 0800 ROCKUP (0800 762 587).

www.rockup.co.nz

Turangi

Turangi Climbing Gym

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