

# THE CLIMBER

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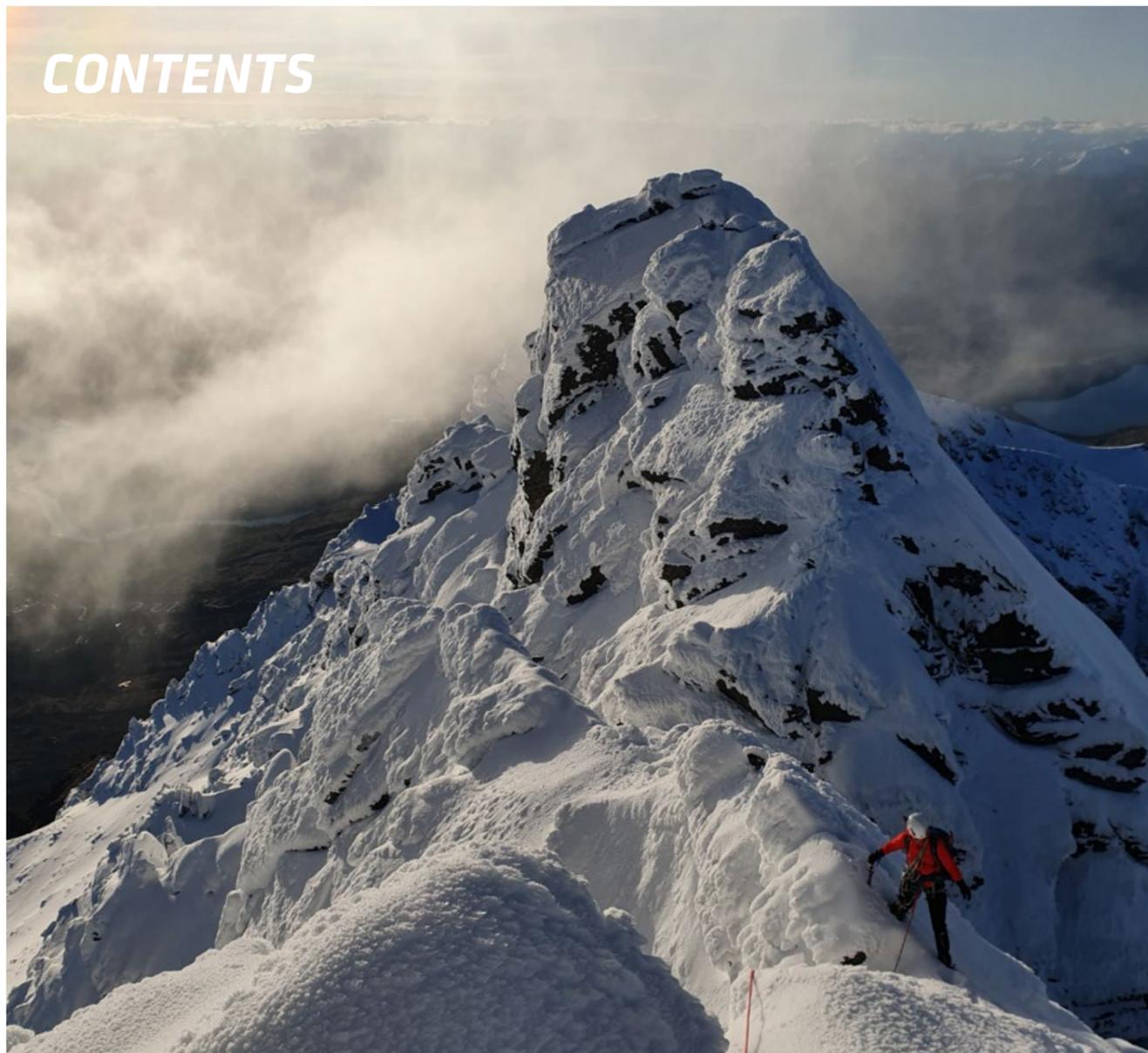
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Erin Stewart attempting Ganba (V6), at Flock Hill. DEREK THATCHER



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New Zealand Alpine Team member Karl 'Merry' Schimanski enjoying the last of the evening light on *Recessionary Downgrade* (M6), Telecom Tower, The Remarkables. GAVIN LANG

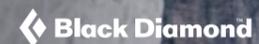
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Maria Koo enjoying an outing along the *Grand Traverse* of The Remarkables with a fresh plastering of winter snow. JOE COLLINSON

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Climbers ascend the iconic Grand Sentinel in Sentinel Pass, Banff National Park  
Photo: ex-Bivouac Staff member John Price / johnpricephotography.ca

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 FACES OF THE FESTIVAL BY GAVIN LANG

This year's Remarkables Ice and Mixed Festival was attended by more climbers than ever before. As with other years, there was no shortage of people out climbing, skiing, taking part in clinics, or learning the basics of snowcraft. But the highlight of the festival is surely the sense of community that results from getting a whole bunch of climbers together in one place and letting them loose. These pages serve as a tribute to those who attended this year—be they first timers, seasoned veterans or volunteer clinic instructors. Thanks to you all.

Next year the festival takes place August 13–16. To attend in 2020, head to [iceandmixedfestival.co.nz](http://iceandmixedfestival.co.nz) to sign up.





◻ LEFT Outgoing NZAC President John Palmer managing to sneak in a bit of bouldering at Castle Hill's Quantum Field around filming an access promo for the club, in combination with The North Face and their Global Climbing Day event. For every attendee of the Global Climbing Day events this year, The North Face donated money to climbing access organisations in New Zealand and Australia, including NZAC. Thanks to the gyms that participated and to John for all his hard work in the area of access over recent years. Pictured is *Pythagoras* (V8). TOM HOYLE

THIS PAGE Edwin Sheppard has also donated time and legal expertise as part of ongoing climbing access efforts. Here he takes a break from his day job as a lawyer in Auckland to swing his tools on *White Jism* (WI4) during this year's Remarkables Ice and Mixed Festival. TOM HOYLE

## THE ART OF THINKING SAFELY

**IN THE** article 'The Art of Thinking Safely' (*The Climber* #108) the author provides two examples of questioning and analysing why we do things. The first is the method used to attach the personal safety lanyard (commonly known as PAS) to the harness. He claims that 'a better option than girth-hitching the lanyard through the waist belt and leg loops, the rope tie-in attachment point, is to girth-hitch the sling directly into the belay loop...'

The author focuses on the differing properties of spectra and nylon to argue that abrasion to the harness tie-in points will be exacerbated, but fails to mention that there might be valid reasons for the two point girth-hitch attachment, and that it is the method recommended by some big guns, not just 'most beginners' or those accepting 'the way you were shown a long time ago'. The three major US PAS manufacturers—Metolius, Sterling and Black Diamond—all show or describe the waist loop and leg-loop girth hitch in their instructional videos or technical information.

Black Diamond, in a QC Lab, 'Personal Anchor Systems Explained', goes so far as to specifically rule out the belay loop attachment and explains the reasons for preference for use of the tie-in point as:

- The Association of Canadian Mountain Guides rule of thumb: belay loops for metal (i.e. carabiners) and tie-in points for fabrics (i.e. ropes and slings), to keep the belay loop clean for belaying.

- Girth-hitching the PAS to the belay loop limits its ability to rotate, which can result in excessive wear on the underside of the belay loop (the Todd Skinner fatality scenario). It is important to note that the mitigation necessary to prevent this is twofold (and unfortunately not mentioned in the article) 1) to continually check the belay loop for wear; 2) to continually shift

the position of the girth hitch on the belay loop, so wear is spread.

Of course, there is another form of personal safety which means we don't have to worry about all the above—clove hitch into the anchor with the climbing rope, unless the rope needs to be out of the system (for abseiling, for example).

The aim of the article is admirable, and the advice to 'be continually asking yourself: Is it safe? Will it work? Do you know why you are doing it that way? Does/will it work?' without being a slave to habit is invaluable. As with so much in climbing, there is often more than one way to do things, each with its advantages and disadvantages, and the PAS attachment to the harness is one of these.

I would strongly advise considering:

- Extreme care when going against experts' or manufacturers' recommendations. If this is to be done, these recommendations should be acknowledged and addressed in the assessment;

- That *The Climber* has a strong obligation not to publish incorrect or misleading technical information. To avoid this, all technical articles should be vetted by recognised experts. All climbers should do the same: research authoritative sources and talk to experts.

—Dave Brash

(Editor's reply: I'd like to thank Dave for writing in and for endorsing the main message of Gideon's article. I think it is important for all climbers to adopt this way of thinking as much as possible.

I've also accepted Dave's implicit offer to review this type of technical article for *The Climber* in the future.

In regard to the particular example of the PAS attachment, I'm still prepared to argue the case. I absolutely agree with Dave that close attention should be paid to manufacturer's recommendations in regard to this kind of technical



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safety equipment. However, manufacturers are not always right. For example, for many years Petzl's own instructions on proper use of the Grigri while belaying were considered a sub-optimal method by most experts and have now been modified to reflect this.

In the QC Lab from Black Diamond, they make their own 'appeal to authority' argument, referencing a 'rule of thumb' from the ACMG that Dave has quoted. I'm assuming they mean 'clean' as-in 'clear and tangle free' when citing the need for fabric and metal separation. I consider this fairly subjective advice and organise my harness as I see best suits the situation, rather than always by a 'rule of thumb'.

In terms of the unfortunate Todd Skinner scenario, harness wear is absolutely a factor and the point of Gideon's original example. Leaving a PAS permanently attached to your harness via either method is encouraging unseen harness wear. Attach your PAS when the situation dictates you need one, and inspect your harness as you do this. As Dave writes, there are alternative options to a PAS in many climbing situations.)

THIS ISSUE'S PRIZE GOES TO:  
**DAVE BRASH**



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**Our core purpose** is to foster and support climbing.

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## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND THE GREAT DEBATE

**THE NZAC** Annual General Meeting will be held on 1 November 2019, in Christchurch (location TBC). Come and meet the new President and Board and learn about our achievements from the past year. The meeting will be followed by the return of The Great Debate, arguing the topic, 'Are we a climbing club or a conservation club?' This will be followed by a light supper. Please come along and help us celebrate another successful year!

## TRIAL BOOKING SYSTEM AT ASPIRING HUT

**DUE TO** increasing demand at Aspiring Hut, NZAC is partnering with the Department of Conservation to trial a booking system for this hut, starting 1 December 2019. Due to constraints with the software, NZAC members will need to ring the Wanaka Visitors Centre (03-443 7660) in order to obtain member prices. The trial will run until the end of April. There will also be a hut fee increase introduced from 1 December, with member prices going from \$15 to \$20, and non-members from \$30 to \$40. This brings Aspiring Hut back into line with our other huts and helps lessen the impact of increasing costs associated with running our huts.

## HUT FEE INCREASES

**THE ACCOMMODATION** Committee and Board have reviewed NZAC hut fees in light of increasing costs and chosen to standardise these fees across the network. These changes will come into effect from 1 December 2019. In most places, this means no change for members and a small increase for non-members. For a full list of changes, please see the news article on the website here: [alpineclub.org.nz/hut-fee-increase-2019/](http://alpineclub.org.nz/hut-fee-increase-2019/).

## NEW DISCOUNTS FOR MEMBERS

**FOUR NEW** providers have joined our 'discounts to members' list. We are excited to announce that the following new discounts are now available to members. To read full details on these and our other discount providers, please check out the NZAC website: [alpineclub.org.nz/membership-benefits/member-discounts/](http://alpineclub.org.nz/membership-benefits/member-discounts/)

- NZAC members only: The North Face – 15% instore (Auckland, Christchurch, Queenstown).
- NZAC/FMC members: Air Charter Karamea – 10% discount.
- Packrafting Queenstown – 10% discount.
- Mountain Outdoors – 10% discount.

## MOIR'S GUIDE SOUTH

**THIS POPULAR** guide is long out-of-print and oft-requested. But good news is at hand. Author Robin McNeill has declared his intention to produce a new edition, tentatively available in autumn next year.

Robin is seeking up-to-date information about track and hut conditions, and corrections to information in the Great Southern Lakes region for the new edition. As well, he seeks photographs for use in the new guidebook which will be published in colour. Please send updated information on access, huts, routes, and photographs to: [robin@venturesouthland.co.nz](mailto:robin@venturesouthland.co.nz).

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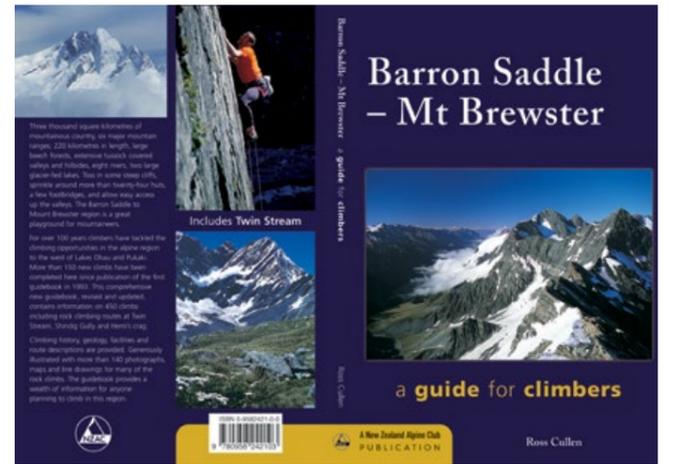
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## NEW OHAU LANDSBOROUGH GUIDEBOOK IN THE WORKS

**JAMES THORNTON**, Nina Dickerhof and Ross Cullen are working on this title which will replace the *Barron Saddle – Mt Brewster* guidebook in spring 2020, with more than 100 new climbs since the current edition.

The authors request colour photographs for publication and information such as errors and omissions in the current edition, changes to existing routes, access, huts, and of course, new routes.

- Please contact the authors directly:
- James Thornton (j.m.thornton@live.com) for Landsborough, Hunter/Makarora, West of the Hooker Range, McKerrow Range.
  - Ross Cullen (rosscullen.kiwi@gmail.com) for Bush Stream, Twin Stream rock and ice climbing.
  - Nina Dickerhof (nina.dickerhof@gmail.com) for Dobson, Hopkins, Huxley, Ahuriri, Barrier Rane, Ben Ohau Range.



## ELCHO HUT WORK PARTY

**MANY THANKS** to the volunteers at the recent North Otago annual work party to Elcho Hut. Nick Shearer advises they restocked the woodshed, installed a photoelectric ten-year battery alarm, fixed the toilet door, cleaned the hut and topped up the bait stations. The report is they found the hut in great condition and no major work is foreseeable in the next year or two. Our thanks to Nick Shearer, Hugh Wood, Campbell Liddell, Dave Bryant, Tiernan Farrell, Dave Liddell, John Hamilton, Patrick McNamara and Ross Cullen for their efforts in maintaining this popular hut.



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## HOW YOUR OBSERVATIONS IMPROVE PUBLIC SAFETY

### What makes the public avalanche forecaster's job challenging in New Zealand and how can you help to solve this?

The New Zealand Avalanche Advisory (NZAA), run by the Mountain Safety Council (MSC), forecasts for 12 geographic regions. Each of these regions encompasses a wide variety of terrain, weather conditions and, most critically, field-based information sources. Of the 12 regions, Mt Hutt is the smallest at 176km<sup>2</sup>, with Fiordland the biggest at 4042km<sup>2</sup>.

In New Zealand, we use a regional forecasting model. The forecaster(s) lives, works and plays in, or very close to, the region they forecast for. This model differs to other countries. For example, in Canada most of their forecasting is performed from a base in Revelstoke, British Columbia. This is a centralised forecasting model. Each approach has its advantages and disadvantages. Ultimately, it's about finding and testing what works for each country based on the unique features as they exist in that country or region.

The key ingredient to any forecasting system is not how much time the forecaster spends in the hills, but how much data they have available to them to help shape their understanding of the conditions and the forecasts they create.

Simply put, the more data that is available, the more likely the forecast is going to be representative of the geographic area and accurately portray the dangers present or forecast.

Despite New Zealand's relatively small size, as well as a few small forecast regions, several of our forecast areas suffer from a lack of field information. These are considered 'data sparse' regions. That's not to say the forecasts are inaccurate, just that they're created with less information available than other areas, or with only a few varying data sources; adding more data sources is incredibly valuable to the forecasters.

So, what do we mean by field information, or data? In its most simple form, this means any accurate and timely information about weather conditions, snowpack or avalanche observations. The three most commonly available and helpful information sources our forecasters have access to involve the 'Information Exchange' (InfoEx) subscriber data, NIWA's Snow and Ice Monitoring Network and MetService's weather station and forecasts.

MSC operates the InfoEx subscriber platform within the same web platform that the NZAA is run. As a subscription service, it's not visible to the public. The InfoEx enables snow-based operators to input their own observation data and run their own operational hazard analysis. The InfoEx provides a daily exchange of information between subscribers and improves their ability to manage their operations safely. Subscribers are most commonly heli-skiing companies, skifields, or ski or climbing guiding businesses.

InfoEx data is invaluable for the avalanche forecasters as it provides multiple sets of 'eyes in the field' across numerous locations.

Unfortunately, this isn't the case across all regions as InfoEx subscribers tend to be based in a small set of common areas. As an example, the Queenstown forecast region has ten different subscribers, whereas Arthur's Pass has two and Nelson Lakes only one.

To supplement this data MSC has partnered with NIWA, which allows access to their Snow and Ice Monitoring Network. Essentially, this network is a collection of 12 automatic weather stations situated in remote mountainous areas. These stations provide real time weather data, such as precipitation, temperature, humidity, pressure, wind speed and direction, snow depth and so on. This data is irreplaceable. It's often the only way we can understand what's occurring in the remotest parts of our mountains across a continuous time period.

In 2018, MSC decided to tackle the challenge of 'data sparse' regions. The data gathering tactic that is now operational is the development of a public observation tool, which is fully integrated into the NZAA. This enables anyone to add a snowpack or avalanche observation, with accompanying information and up to two photos. Anyone can see these observations for a seven-day period.

Submissions require no account setup or logging in. This was a tactical decision to trust the user communities' desire for accurate and timely forecasts. MSC also wanted to reduce any potential barriers to using the tool by making submissions as easy as possible.

Trev Streat, one of the forecasters for Aoraki/Mt Cook, Two Thumbs and Ohau, describes the public observation tool. 'In the MacKenzie, we're forecasting across a very large area with different climate zones and a highly variable snowpack, often on a pretty limited set of data due to the fact that we can't make direct observations right across the patch on any given day. Public observations are therefore a very useful tool for forecasting, either to inform us about areas we have been unable to visit, or to validate previous predictions we may have made about avalanching or snow conditions.'

Building a community of engaged users will take time. The hope is that the NZAA map will be increasingly full of public observations, covering areas that are well outside the common skifield backcountry access points. The tool is applicable to backcountry travel in all forms and has been developed for use by climbers, skiers, hunters and trampers.

Jamie Robertson, part of the NZAA co-ordination team, stresses: 'Even if you don't know the professional terms, photos (with location, date and time) or a description in your own words is massively helpful for the forecasters. Don't underestimate how useful this is.'

Find out more at [avalanche.net.nz](http://avalanche.net.nz)

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JULIA CHANOURDIE // We're always focused on our climbing performance, whether it's indoor training, competitions, or outdoor climbing, but revisiting the fundamentals of belaying is equally important. // #belaybetter



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## LYNN HILL: Kidnapped By Climbing

INTERVIEW BY ERIN STEWART AND CHRISTINA RIVETT

**IT'S 11:30PM** on a Friday night in June. The car dashboard reads -6°C degrees outside. Cartoon-like frost and ice on the road twinkling in the headlights confirm this. We're somewhere near the northern end of the Lindis Valley, just entering a steep part of the pass, when the driver suddenly notices the petrol light is on. A gasp, an exclamation, nervous laughter trying to downplay the potential situation, a check of the car system info. Yes, we're nearly out of gas, and have been so for some time without the driver realising. Raised eyebrows. Groans of disbelief. No cell-phone reception. Frantic attempts to calculate how many more kilometres we might get out of the unknown-sized tank. The car tells us we have only 15kms of petrol left. Surely there's at least triple that? The driver nervously begins counting road signs, anticipating how far she might need to run back to the last point with reception. An 18-wheeler appears out of the dark, driver puzzled as to why the idiot tourists behind him won't pass, even when it's safe to do so. Cowering in his slipstream, coasting in neutral at every opportunity, we anxiously hope to see the bright lights of Tarras around each corner, and doubly hope that said bright lights are beaming out of an open gas station.

For future reference, Tarras does indeed have a 24hr self-serve station. And a trusty (how could we have ever doubted you?) 2012 Toyota Highlander has a 72.5L tank. Useful to know these things. I'm sure you're wondering what could possibly have distracted the driver so much that she didn't notice the gauge steadily dropping, and then the bright orange petrol light glaring up at her. The answer is, of course, our imminent meeting with one of the greatest climbing legends of our time, Lynn Hill.

Ironically, three opportunistic boulderers were dispatched to interview this master of big wall climbing. With nerves building over the preceding weeks, slightly hysterical jokes about stealthing into the Lake Wanaka Centre, kidnapping Lynn and bundling her into the car à la Jason Bourne novel eased the trepidation somewhat. Amusingly that is not far from what we actually did, though with less clandestine tactics. With the nearby Wanaka cafes all brimming with Mountain Film and Book Festival-goers, we decided the best course of action for uninterrupted gossiping was to head back to our Airbnb armed with cheese and refreshments. To our great excitement, when offered tea, coffee or beer at midday, Lynn replied: 'Yeah, let's have a beer.'

Perhaps the excellent Funk Estate brews eased the awkwardness. We found Lynn to be extremely personable and affable, as interested in our stories as we were in hers. Playing back the recording of our interview, we were dismayed to discover that a significant portion of the allotted time was taken up with our own voices, due entirely to Lynn questioning us, curiously enquiring about our daily and climbing lives. Clearly accustomed to social situations with strangers and highly adept at casual conversation, Lynn was an easy person to spend an hour with. We could easily have enjoyed her company for much longer.

With a Bachelor of Science degree under her belt, she could've been a biologist or a physical therapist. Instead, she was 'kidnapped by climbing'. Introduced to the world of rock by older siblings at age 14, Lynn rapidly excelled at climbing, no doubt aided by a competitive gymnastic past. Spanning almost 45 years, her climbing resumé and her long list of 'firsts' will be familiar to most consumers of this magazine: first woman to climb 5.12d (27) (the hardest grade in the world at the time); first woman to onsight 5.13b (29); first woman to climb 5.14a (32), a grade famously claimed to be impossible for a woman by top French climber Jean-Baptiste Tribout, who was equally famously proven wrong when Lynn



sent his climb *Masse Critique* within the year and in significantly fewer attempts than Tribout; first free ascents of numerous 5.12+ (24+) routes across the USA; most famously, her first free ascent of *The Nose* on El Capitan, then a year later in 1994 the first free ascent in a day, unrepeated for over ten years.

When still just a teenager, Lynn found herself integrating into the testosterone-fuelled 'Stonemasters', an infamous motley crew of climbers based mostly in Yosemite during the '70s. Here she cut her teeth on slabs, big walls and trad, learning techniques and skills that would propel her into the top ranks of climbing on a global scale.

Perhaps it was the novelty of such a tiny woman achieving exploits unattainable by many men that drew mainstream media attention. Over the next decade, Lynn was invited to participate in multiple television shows including *Survival of the Fittest* (which she won four seasons in a row and first visited New Zealand for), and accepted some questionable frivolous challenges, such as climbing over the top of a hot air balloon mid-flight.

Being part of the pioneering generation of competition climbers gained her further fame. When asked for her thoughts on the current scene, she laughs, believing that if she had entered the sport in these Olympic-level times, she wouldn't stand a chance. 'If I were to start climbing today, I would never make it into that realm. Competitions back then were a novelty. I'd never climbed on an artificial wall before.'

Her drive for competing at the time seems to be partly innate to her character and partly about wanting to explore the possibilities of this new concept, rather than an ambition to conquer her peers and claim the glory. Despite that, winning came naturally to Lynn with over 30 international titles to her name, including five wins at the Arco Rock Masters.

Stories in her book of those early competition days are bluntly shocking—routes chipped and trees cut down before purpose-built walls became the norm, rules being bent and outright changed to benefit the preferred winner. Politics, disorganisation, sexism. In one instance, when questioning the difference in prize winnings between men and women

she was told, 'If the women climb without their tops, then we'll pay them the same.' Not the first, nor the last, gender-negative experience in this male-dominated sport.

Despite these shenanigans, competitions dominated Lynn's climbing life for several years in the late '80s and early '90s, her winnings supplying enough income along with sponsorships to allow her to climb professionally.

While appreciative of the opportunities that arose during this period, the reality of being a professional sponsored climber became clear, and Lynn realised early on that maintaining this path wouldn't be a wise choice for her. 'It wasn't worth the commitment on my side, not healthy for me to be feeling like I'm asking for a handout. I would rather be in charge of my own career.' In the current climate of omnipresent social media, the pitfalls of narcissism and having to satisfy sponsors and your audience by constantly showing and telling yourself on social media is something she deliberately chooses to avoid. She watches young climbers today getting sucked into this game and doesn't see a good outcome in the future for them. 'They have no control over their schedules. They have to constantly post updates, do exploits, create one-liners, provide "entertainment" that takes away from the authenticity of the sport. I've observed what happens to people who allowed themselves to be put on a pedestal. You're expected to be something for the people, but you're left up there all by yourself. You're exposed and alone. I'm very proud that I've managed to maintain my love of climbing without it being tainted or manipulated by the system. I've protected it.'

The flip side of this is, of course, that climbing solely for passion doesn't award a steady income. The reality of parenthood requires her to provide stability for her son, both financially and personally. Small business pursuits include running an Airbnb from her home (something she enjoys for its social aspect as well as how it keeps her at home), coaching, professional consulting, public speaking and guiding, though the latter is less appealing. 'There's a little bit of a conflict in the role of a guide. When people pay you money, there's an expectation that they're guaranteed safety, guaranteed success. But that's not the mentality of a climber. If you want to be a climber, you should earn your way there. So I can teach, I can help people get there and have fun with them, but a lot of times it feels like babysitting.' Coaching is a different story, however. Lynn sees it as a valid way of adding value and making a living, and one she enjoys. It's clear in conversation that Lynn has a genuine interest in sharing her experience and knowledge for others to benefit and learn from, and is happy to oblige in communicating the lessons she has learned over the years.

Despite being described at various times as a 'prodigy' and 'arguably the best climber in the world, male or female,' Lynn has been well acquainted with sexism in the climbing world. As an early outlier she, along with a handful of other women, pushed back against the expectations that women should be passive, pretty, non-muscular and willing to step aside and let the men lead the way. While she never set out to be a feminist icon of the sport, Lynn inevitably became an advocate for gender equality, a role she has embraced simply by doing what she did best. To us, her attitude wasn't so much a loud 'girls can do anything', but rather a quiet curiosity to test the limitations imposed upon her by the culture of the time, believing that said boundaries just wouldn't hold up—a fact she has proven time and time again. 'So here's my thing. When I talk about women and the vision of women in climbing, we believe what we've been told. Think about in my lifetime. People said really crazy things, but it's all in the head, right? If you've been told that [you can't], what do you believe? What's physically possible and what's psychologically possible are two different things.' With this unwavering mindset, Lynn has helped pave the way for today's female athletes, her fame and visibility normalising strong women, and showing us that, man or woman, 'the rock is an objective medium that is equally open for interpretation by all'.

Still, with her famously petite stature (just a little over 155cm tall, with hands too small to palm a basketball), she is no stranger to her success being downplayed as 'easier' due to her tiny fingers, or ability to fit into small spaces, or insert-generic-sexist-remark-here. Talking about the 'Great Roof' section of *The Nose*, she explains that she couldn't reach any

footholds that taller climbers could, and therefore had to bunch herself up under the roof, awkwardly standing on non-existent, slippery smears. 'All the years when they said it was easier for me because I have such small fingers, well, guess what guys? It's not easier. But I was motivated, and stronger.'

It comes naturally for three short females and frequent climbers at Castle Hill Basin to delve further into the topic of height and reach. Lynn nods knowingly to descriptions of challenges with sparsely-featured boulders where there simply aren't other options for smaller people. 'I never really bring that point up, but when people go, "Oh I say this to my girlfriend whenever she can't make a reach, I say "but Lynn Hill could do that." I let them have that because it's good to think that. It's encouraging. But sometimes I just don't feel I can make the reach, and there's no way to jump through, or no intermediates. If you can do an iron cross, you can make big reaches, but if you can't span between the holds, well ... It's always good to try, but sometimes it's just not suitable.' Like many other vertically-challenged (usually female) midgets, Lynn has adapted her climbing methods to allow for her diminutive size by 'just trying to find variations of ways to do it. I always find my own beta and tune people out. If they try to give beta to me ... well, it's usually just not helpful.'

One of our curiosities was if and how Lynn trained for her climbing achievements. Training as we know it—with speciality system boards, every imaginable shape of fingerboard, purpose-built campus boards and assessment systems—was never a thing during the peak of Lynn's career. Did she care for the stats and numbers? How did she prepare for feats such as *The Nose*? Did she have a specialised training regime? 'No, not really. Even though I was a scientist, with my climbing I never counted or measured anything or tracked numbers. I just always thought of it in terms of phases, which I learned from running. (Lynn was also a successful competitive track runner during her college years). First is the founda-

Lynn out enjoying the local rock at Little Big Wall in Wanaka. DOM CHANNON



tional phase, then you bump up the intensity, maybe in quantity but you focus more on quality, then when you want to peak, you rest and let your body repair, and then you do something really hard. That's basically how I prepared for *The Nose*.'

While acknowledging that intense and formulaic training can benefit when you're young and pursuing a specific goal, for Lynn it was never 'real climbing' and wasn't something she ever wanted to focus on. She voices concerns about young climbers training too hard and burning themselves out too quickly. 'On rest days, I would study French and Italian. We took more time off back in those days, but I don't know if the climbers of today even have the energy to do stuff like that. When you're young, it's appropriate [to train hard]. It's a good way to focus your energy to achieve something for your mind, for your body. But then later ... well you gotta make a living. The realities of life come in. You can't really stay on that edge forever, and I don't think it would be healthy to.'

Such realities make Lynn's life today look very different to the early boundary-pushing time of the '80s and '90s. She recognises that there's a natural deceleration of a climber's career. Younger generations enter the sport who are better, stronger, and willing to do all the social media, along with other factors and responsibilities coming into play. Motherhood has contributed to this change in a big way, but not regrettably. Physically, a hastily performed caesarian section has left her with some deficiencies in her abdominals which will require careful and extensive re-training. Practically, she found that life on the constant go with a small child, travelling all over the world to climb, was not working well for her son, compelling her to settle in one place and give up long trips away for the time being. Mentally, she has no desire to push through danger or take the risks she would have when she was younger, conscious of her responsibility as a mostly solo parent. With her 16-year-old son Owen—who has zero interest in climbing, but plenty of enthusiasm for his own choice of hobbies—Lynn has settled in Boulder, Colorado, establishing a satisfying set-up and enjoying the abundant local climbing, coaching and consulting, and earning a modest but steady income from her Airbnb. Though 'decelerated', she is far from retired and continues to push herself and climb hard. Unable to resist a challenge, earlier this year she projected and sent *The Orb* (5.13b/29) in Boulder Canyon, proving that, at the age of 58, 'it still goes, boys!'

The same curiosity that seems to have driven her throughout her climbing life is still clearly evident when talking about the future. She is still very much attracted to exploring what she might be capable of. One project lurking in the back of her mind is what another stint on *The Nose* would be like. This October, she's hoping to assist Nina Caprez in repeating the free ascent, as long as she has enough time to retrain her fingers and get her core muscles in shape. Recent house renovations have been time-consuming, and she is keen to turn her energy back towards climbing.

Asked if she has any regrets or felt she's missed out on anything over the years, she replies, 'I wouldn't know, because I missed them. There's so many paths. You can't follow them all. There were opportunities that would've enabled me to be more comfortable at this stage of my life. I could've got into bringing the first artificial indoor walls to the US, but I kinda just accommodated everything that was being requested of me, rather than being more proactive. But it was great, I got to do things that other people wouldn't have been able to do.'

By this stage we have held Lynn captive far past our allocated time slot. Messages arrive summoning us to deliver Lynn back as she is late for her next appointment. We guiltily comply, hastily snapping selfies and peppering her with our last questions as we walk out the door.

With a slight hit of FOMO we hear that Lynn is due the next day to sample Wanaka rock for the first time, being escorted by local climbers, then moving on to Queenstown later in the week for more festival events along with more rock and sight-seeing. Wishing we could be those escorts, or better yet host Lynn for a tour of Castle Hill Basin, we reluctantly say goodbye, knowing we could've happily followed her around for the whole remainder of her trip, watching and learning. 

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## JANE PRESTO

INTERVIEW BY BEN SCHEPP

### 'HEY PRESTO'

*exclamation (British)*

a phrase announcing the successful completion of a trick, or to suggest that something has been done so easily that it seems to be magic.

Jane Presto shows up and disappears like a rabbit out of a conjuror's hat. One moment she is there, the other she has vanished completely, probably out climbing somewhere around Wanaka. Jane possesses the excitement of a magical stage artist and there is no way around it, other than getting sucked into her infectious positivity and obsessive passion for climbing. Her large calloused hands, eroded finger prints and pronounced veins in her forearms are a tell-tale sign that she must spend a lot of time hanging onto the rock. 'Or I could have been a professional at crochet,' she jokes.

Jane compares her excitement for climbing with a dog chasing a ball on the beach, or maybe even two dogs. In her words, she gets way too excited. On the other hand, she is extremely humble about her climbing achievements. In the past year she has ticked off climbs such as *Tormentum Vigilae* (30) at Al Cap and *Hong Kong Phooey* (29) at the ironically named Gentleman's Club crag.

What is probably most impressive is that she only started climbing in her mid-thirties, while being a mum to three children. Before this she dedicated her passion to competitive horse riding, teaching skiing and learning three different languages while living overseas. All of these spanning over a decade each.

Having known Jane for some time now, I sat down with her in her hometown of Wanaka, and was eager to tap into her incredible drive, her passion and what motivates her to climb.

### **Ben:** Jane, tell me about how you got into climbing. How long ago was this?

**Jane:** It was about eight years ago when it all started. It was the late Margie Gillam who introduced me to climbing. We were partners in crime on and off the rock. She was my bestie and we had a lovely friendship. She said one day, 'Come out to Roadside. Bring the kids.' I thought, 'Where is Roadside? Oh well, I will find it.' I rocked up and she presented me with a harness. She said, 'Here. Put this on,' and pointed up the route and said, 'Go up there'. And I did. I have never looked back. It was awesome!

### **You have three teenage children, work in hospitality and volunteer for St John's Ambulance. That sounds busy! How do you fit in climbing?**

My bag is always packed, in the car and ready to go. You make it work, and that's the driving force. I have very small windows to go climbing, but often. Climbing on the actual rock is the easy part. It is the logistics of trying to find someone to get out there with. If I want to get out every second or third day, I have to message up to ten people. I just keep trying. There is always someone—well, nearly always. Otherwise, self-belaying is also okay to fill in the gaps.

### **How does this time pressure affect your climbing?**

I believe it makes me a more persistent climber. Absolutely. I put the same effort into something easier than I do into something harder. So if I have a small window of going climbing, why not challenge myself?



 Jane Presto DOM CHANNON

I can climb something easier, but I don't get as much out of it. I don't seem to mind when I don't get to the top of a climb. It is the challenge, the journey that is the stimulating part of it, the mind-journey of figuring out the move, incrementally getting through it, till you bag it. It requires heaps of focus in a short period of time.

### **How do your kids influence your climbing?**

My kids are my driving force. From early on, they have always been relatively supervised free range, but they are your children and they take up your time. I am always in a rush because I want to get back to them. They are my life.

If I have been out on a climb, I am a better mum because I had my shot. They read me like a book. They know when mummy needs a shot. I want to encourage them to follow their dreams and show them that it is important to maintain the balance in life. The more life demands of an individual, the more an individual will try to find something to balance these demands. The current choice is climbing. It's a juggle, but I make it work. My mum taught me to do the best you can, no matter what you do. And that's what I want to teach my children.

### **In terms of climbing, what are your proudest moments and what are the biggest challenges?**

Some sends stand out but, to be honest, most of the sends are such a brief buzz, compared to the journey. The journey is the bomb. And each day I am climbing and any kind of progress is an achievement. The harder it is to get this increment of progress, the more satisfying it is. So you just want more.



The hardest graded climb I sent, which is *Tormentum Vigilae* (30) at Al Cap, was somehow the easiest. It was after being seven months off climbing, due to an elbow injury. It was the longest I had been out since starting climbing. I had zero expectations.

The biggest challenge is trying to find someone to go climbing with, fitting in with the short windows I have. I prefer to climb in the winter, when the friction is good. But in winter not a lot of people are around.

**How do you prepare for a climb and what is important for you when going out?**

When I go out, it's go hard or go home. There aren't days when I go, 'I am not feeling it today'. It really doesn't happen. It's really about enjoying the moment. It's about making the most of where you are, not where you want to be.

The walk to the crag. Listening to the birds singing. Looking at the colours in the trees. Touch the moss, do something tactile on the way. Just being in touch with where you are and who you are with. It's all about good vibes and being calm. I get very excited, way too excited. It's all about the calm. Being there with my partner, who is also calm. If my partner is in a good space, I am in a good space.

**What does climbing mean to you?**

Climbing is so coherent with life, as with any sport, when you push it to the limit. For me, life and climbing go hand in hand. You get out of it what you put in. You try to find the happy space constantly. It's how you juggle all the variables to activate this happy space, as often as you can. With climbing, it's about being in the zone and appreciating the minute. Consequently, doing well, if you are at it often enough.

Life is the same. If you just sit back and expect things to come to you, it's not going to go well. In a lot of cases, there is a bit of luck. But in general, if you are not going to try, nothing is going to happen. You have to try if you want good things to happen. Yes, undesirable [things] will happen, but they are good too. Even better than good things, because you learn more from them.

If I had started climbing earlier, I wouldn't have thought about it nearly as much because it would have just happened naturally. You don't just sit back and analyse it as much, like all adults tend to do with everything. As kids you do it spontaneously and you are doing all the same things, but you don't think about it as much. You just do it automatically. We lose that ability the older we get. So we start to deliberately try to do it, almost in a contrived way.

The more scared I am and the more I think I can't do a move, the more I have to try hard to do it. If I manage it, or if I get any kind of progress, it pushes me back into child thinking. Of just being spontaneous and going for it. The more I push myself out of my comfort zone, the more I get in the zone, which is just not thinking, but doing.

**Do you have a climbing hero, someone you admire?**

Anyone who tries hard. No matter the number, no matter the grade. I also admire the North Island superstars when they come down. You know who you are. I get a lot of inspiration from them. They bring a good fun, try-hard vibes, as well as climbers from overseas, who bring drive and stimulation.

**For anyone who wants to be a good or better climber, what would be your one piece of advice?**

Keep at it. Perseverance and practice. You have to have passion. Never give up. Don't let anyone ever tell you that you can't or let you down. If this happens, feed off it and let it give you more strength. When working something, be honest, give it heaps and enjoy the moment. 



 LEFT Not one to let a bit of wet rock stand in her way, Jane on *Beardown* (28), at Al Cap. LLEWELLYN MURDOCH

TOP Jane at Roadside Attraction thinking about her sequence. DOM CHANNON

RIGHT Working on the eye-wateringly thin *Onion* (29), Roadside Attraction, Wanaka. DOM CHANNON



◀ *After Midnight*, by Simon Bischoff

**JOHN HARRISON MEMORIAL TROPHY FOR OVERALL CHAMPION AND CHAMPION ROCK CLIMBING**

The impact of a truly amazing image should be as visceral as a punch to the gut. Simon's focus on simplicity helps to tell a story of adventure and athleticism. While simplicity is the image's primary quality, it still invites the viewer to explore. I love how the outline of every quick-draw furthers the narrative of a precarious lead climb on a vertical rock wall embedded in an epic landscape.

When the judges did a quick first pass through all submissions, Simon's image stood out to me like no other image in the competition. It can be appreciated at a glance, offers depth for exploration, and it gives me (I'm not a climber) a serious case of sweaty palms. I could not think of a better image to represent the qualities of this competition. (DR)

## ROCK CLIMBING



▲ *Flex Luthor*, by Tom Hoyle. HONOURS ROCK CLIMBING



▲ *Life's A Beach*, by John Palmer. HONOURS ROCK CLIMBING



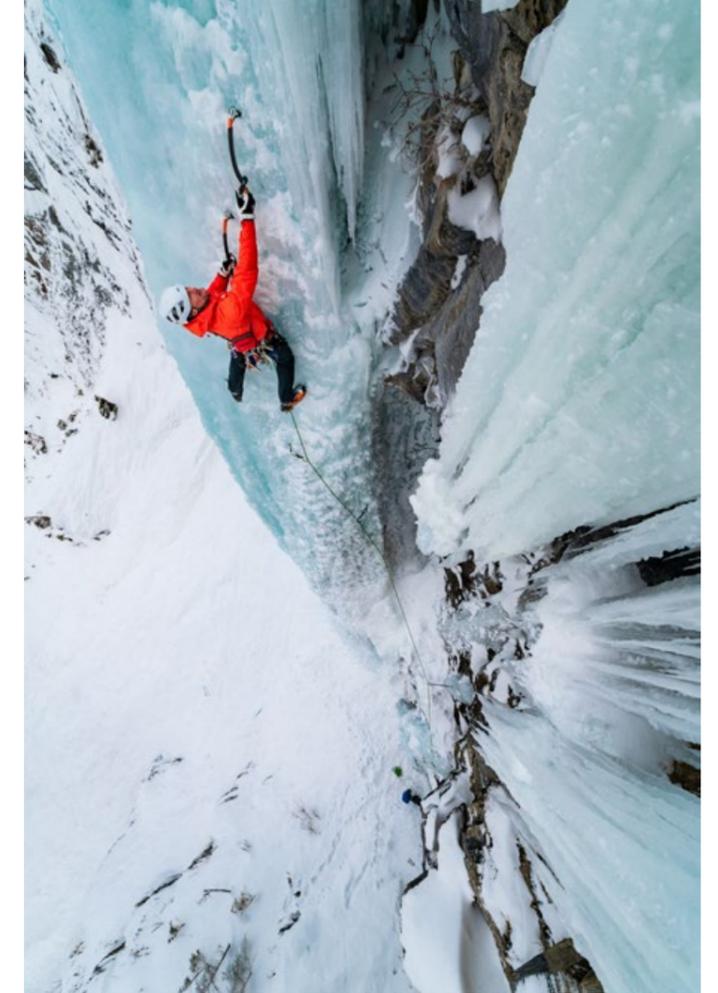
ALPINE ACTIVITY



▲ **Bonar Wanderings**, by Ben Ellis  
GUIDE ALACK CHALLENGE CUP  
AND CHAMPION ALPINE ACTIVITY

There was much robust discussion in this category this year, with several particularly strong entries dividing the judges' opinions. Personally I felt this image represented the category truthfully, but more importantly the spirit of the club. The composition is fantastic, with the textural patterns in the snow and leading lines in the foreground—but what captured my attention was the visceral atmosphere. You can almost feel the wind. Bonus points for not bastardising the image in post—it's been very lightly treated, which is testament to the skills of the photographer at the moment of capture. (SW)

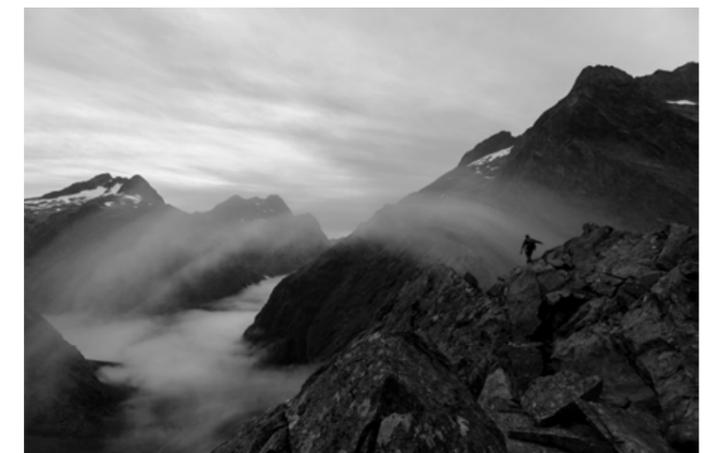
▶ **Yes!**, by Peter Laurenson  
HONOURS ALPINE ACTIVITY



▶ **Traditional Ale (M7) Link up to Pilsner Pillar (WI5+)**, by Ben Sanford  
HONOURS ALPINE ACTIVITY



▶ **A Conscious Footprint**, by Adam Gearing  
HONOURS ALPINE ACTIVITY



▶ **Sharp Contrasts**, by Luke Welch  
HONOURS ALPINE ACTIVITY



▲ **The Cloud Piercer**, by Geoff Marks  
CHAMPION ALPINE LANDSCAPE

Geoff's image of Aoraki quietly moved through the ranks of the selection process without much fuss. As a handful of three-star images were promoted to four-star, we were presented with the best of the best. Again, Geoff's images was there and truly began to stand out. However, the judging was split for the overall champion. A strong case was presented that even though the image was beautifully executed, the cropping could have been handled better. All three judges agreed that the top section of the sky was distracting and reduced the overall impact of the image. (LH)



◀ **The Wedding Cake**, by Simon Bischoff  
HONOURS ALPINE LANDSCAPE



▼ **Ghosts**, by Zofia Seymour  
HONOURS ALPINE LANDSCAPE



▶ **Peruvian Fire**, by Ben Sanford  
HONOURS ALPINE LANDSCAPE



▲ **Ice And Rock**, by Lan Zhang

ERICA BEUZENBERG MEMORIAL AWARD FOR CHAMPION ALPINE NATURE

A worthy winner in an interpretable category. This abstraction of rock and ice in a symmetrical composition is very well considered—but the almost hidden detail of a rope and quickdraw sealed the deal for the judges. This particular ice feature has appeared numerous times by various photographers in previous years but never quite like this. In the Instagram world of cookie-cutter images, congrats on finding a new angle. (SW)



▼ **Misty Morning**, by Jeremy Beckers  
HONOURS ALPINE NATURE

▶ **Poignancy**, by Scott Thorp  
HONOURS ALPINE NATURE

▼ **Droplets**, by Ryan Cambridge  
HONOURS ALPINE NATURE



▼ **Gentians**, by Shaun Barnett  
HONOURS ALPINE NATURE



▼ **Glacial Veins**, by Ben Sanford  
HONOURS ALPINE NATURE



[ MOUNTAIN AND CLIMBING CULTURE ]



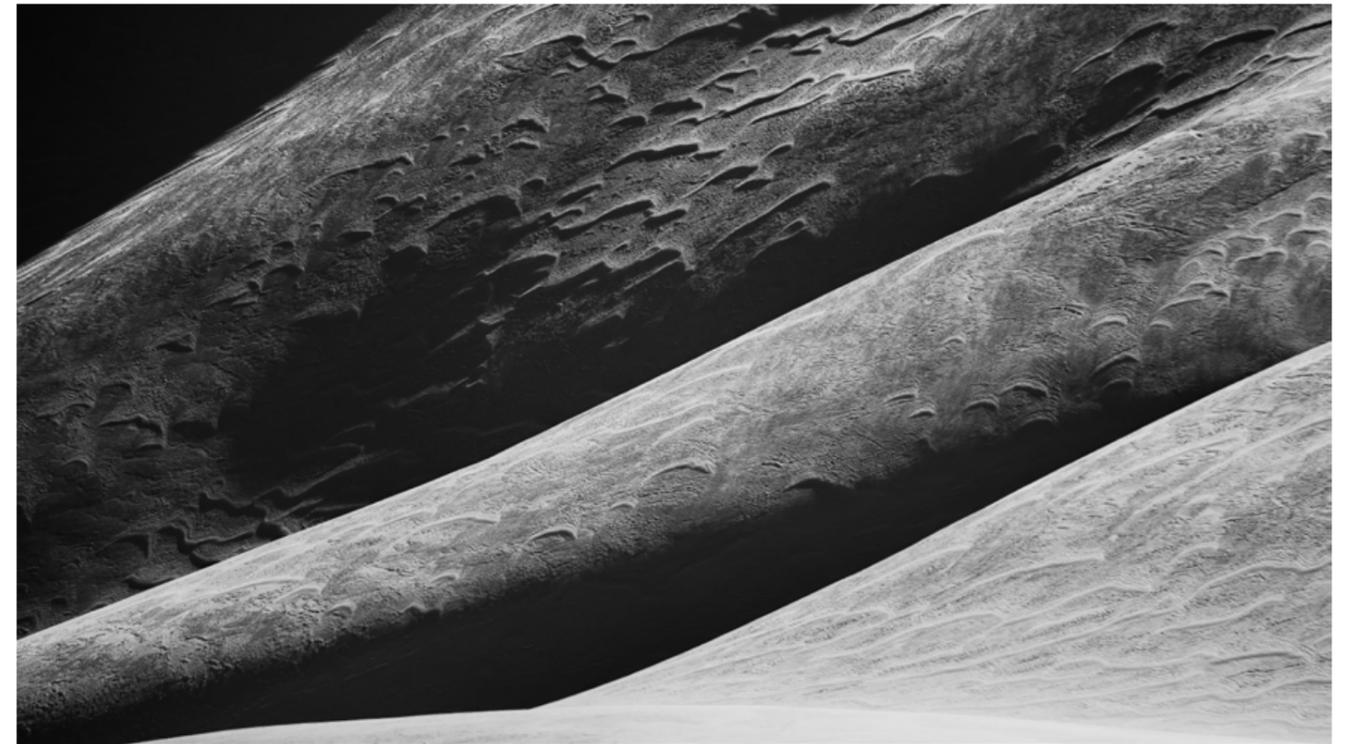
▲ **Total Horror**, by Peter Laurenson  
**CHAMPION MOUNTAIN AND CLIMBING CULTURE**

I like everything about this image. The composition, focal point, depth of field and the blood red sign framed by the lush green of the forest draws the viewer's eye to the HORROR that lies ahead. A great image and a worthy winner of the category. (LH)

▶ **Home Sweet Dome**, by Luke Welch  
**HONOURS MOUNTAIN AND CLIMBING CULTURE**



▶ **Roadies**, by Zofia Seymour  
**HONOURS MOUNTAIN AND CLIMBING CULTURE**



[ YOUTH ]

▲ **Moonscape**, by Oscar Hetherington  
**ALPINE RECREATION YOUTH AWARD FOR CHAMPION YOUTH**

Oscar's image of windswept snowy ridges plays with texture and repetition in an abstract that manages to be simple and complex at the same time. His black and white edit further focuses the image on shape until it takes on almost surreal qualities. It reminds me a lot of the harsh landscape images taken on the moon 50 years ago. I am looking forward to seeing more work by an emerging photographer with a keen eye for light and detail. (DR)

▼ **Dwarfed By Mountains**, by Oscar Hetherington  
**HONOURS YOUTH**



**THE JUDGES**

**LEE HOWELL** has developed a reputation for producing high quality, professional images for corporate, editorial and advertising clients alike.

While Lee loves the challenge of shooting automotive and sports subjects, his real passion lies in working with people and creating portraits that glow with a natural warmth and capture a person's true character.

Lee's work has graced the pages of numerous NZAC publications. When he's not working, Lee likes to splash mud on his bike or unwind amongst the tranquility of the slopers and swimming holes at Paynes Ford.

To see more of Lee's work visit: [leehowell.com](http://leehowell.com).

**SIMON WATERHOUSE** is a former designer/photographer, now a commercial Film Director and Director of Photography at Resonate ([resonate.co.nz](http://resonate.co.nz)). The moving image, especially in the outdoors is where he is most at home. Simon has a personal interest in adventure documentaries, having produced three short films with local and international recognition—most notably *Waters Of The Greenstone* at the Banff Mountain Film Festival and his latest co-directed climbing documentary *Pacific Lines*, currently in submissions for the adventure film festival circuit. His attitude towards climbing? He who has the most fun, wins—which is possibly just an excuse for mediocrity.

**DENNIS RADERMACHER** is an architectural photographer and loves to dabble in the great outdoors. As a regular contributor to *Wilderness Magazine* and photography tutor at Hero Workshops, he likes to roam the backcountry whenever possible.

Check out Dennis' work at: [lightforge.co.nz](http://lightforge.co.nz)

# KAKAPO CREST

AN ALL-FEMALE EXPEDITION INTO UNEXPLORED TERRAIN IN FIORDLAND.

WORDS AND IMAGES BY OLIVIA PAGE

📷 Ana Richards enjoying the sunset over Mount Danger and Lady of the Snows.



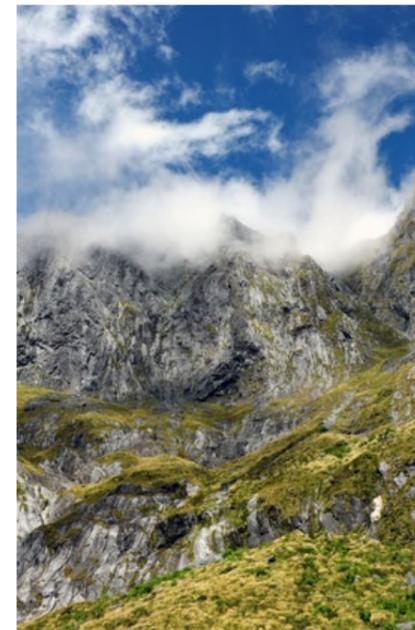
This trip into Fiordland had quietly manifested itself in the back of my mind. Ever-changing, morphing and growing with me. So when, on 6 February 2019, I stood watching the sun melt into the Tasman Sea, painting the surrounding snowcapped peaks pink, I thought: 'Manifestation is truly a strange creature.'

I'd spent four months flying over Fiordland, documenting the venison recovery industry in 2010 for a photography book. Days upon days of flying over countless rivers, fjords, sounds and lakes. Hundreds of unnamed peaks, jungle-like gullies and saddles. Mammoth tussock beds that swayed like seaweed underwater. Alpine tarns and lakes reflecting mountain top after mountain top. Knife blade ridgelines that went for as far as the eye could see. At this time I had yet to discover the art of rock climbing, but I was already in love with those peaks. I just didn't know what to do with them yet.

In 2018, I applied for an adventure film grant on a whim. I then spent the next six months forgetting about it .. until I received the phone call. 'You've won the grant.' Shit.

Our objective was a first peaks traverse from Terror Peak/Llawrenny Peaks area to Mount Danger, then on to Lady of the Snows, with accompanying first climbing ascents. We were Tasmanian climber and conservationist Liz Oh, Tasmanian climber and conservationist Rosie Hohnen, New Zealand climber and conservationist Ana Richards, and myself—climber and photographer.

I did insist to everyone that I wasn't going to win the grant and to forget about the trip, so lucky for me everyone was still in when the good news arrived. That's when we realised just how little information was available on the region. Only a handful of people had ever scrambled up the vertical spur out of Sinbad Gully to the tops, and no one to our knowledge had traversed between said peaks. Ascents had been made on all of them. However, we knew of no one who had managed to get across the aptly-named (by those few that had seen or attempted it) 'disgusting saddle', sitting between peaks unofficially named The Tusk and Mount Danger.



We gave ourselves 20 days, an ambitious timeframe due to Fiordland's temperamental weather and even more so because we were filming. Due to this fact, I decided we needed a focal point for the film—in case we didn't make the entire traverse. The Tusk kept coming up. I'd read an article describing the peak and the Kakapo research that had been done there during the '70s, and of a Kakapo volunteer and climber named Hugh Willhouby, who had tragically fallen in his solo attempt of the peak. Additionally, we learned that below the peak, near Lake Liz, there was once a Kakapo stronghold and that some researchers believed that some birds might still be there. For a bunch of geeky conservationists, this was a bonus.

Lake Liz also looked like a good first basecamp, being somewhat sheltered. We knew camping and finding water on the ridge traverse could be tricky. It was also a perfect place to play with the idea of making a first climbing ascent on The Tusk.

Finding beta was almost impossible. I paid a visit to Federated Mountain Clubs executive officer Danilo Hegg to discuss the spur out of Sinbad Gully. His advice was, 'Don't take heavy packs. Maybe take a hand saw. Vertical scrambling. Don't let go, or you'll fall to the valley floor. Maybe take a rope.' Then I spoke to Nick Flyvbjerg, who's put up numerous climbing routes on Terror Peak. 'When I'm on Terror,' he told me, 'I can see the peak you're describing. Sheer. Vegetated. Where it's steep, you can assume there will be a line somewhere. On Terror there are fused seams, open book corners. Take your nut tool. Brace yourself for some gardening.'

Then I made the mission to catch bird researcher Rhys Buckingham. He unofficially named The Tusk in the '70s, and was on the same kakapo research trip as Hugh Willhouby, the climber who fell. I drove for eight hours to Haast in dismal conditions in search of a random, unmarked 4WD track. I found it and drove to a mosquito-infested bog to set up camp for the night. A nice bottle of red came out as the damp night set in, and Rhys began to relive stories from before PLBs, accurate weather forecasts and lightweight anything. We found a balance between 'not letting the truth ruin a good story' and 'not letting a good story ruin the truth'. We talked about rare birds, exploring chossy unclimbed peaks, almost dying from hypothermia, bivvying under rocks and not hearing from your mother for weeks. We also talked about how Rhys first met Hugh in Milford. Hugh was exiting Fiordland after spending time in there as a volunteer on kakapo. Rhys remembered fondly how easy it was to convince Hugh to go back in with him to Lake Liz, where Rhys wanted to climb a peak he'd named The Tusk.

Armed with as much info as we could get (which wasn't much), we realised we couldn't possibly carry in all that we needed, especially up that spur. So we packed the essentials and threw the rest in a heli-drop destined to meet us at Lake Liz. We struggled to secure a way across Milford Sound, left to walking the docks until a friend of a friend found us a crayfishing boat. The only catch was that we needed to wait for the fishermen to go out. When we eventually crossed, a 50mm rain forecast loomed for the following evening.

'It's a good day for sandflies,' the fisherman smiled at Liz as we boarded the vessel. It was her first trip to New Zealand. What an introduction. After a short trip, we paddled into the rocky shore in an old wooden dinghy, scooping out water with a bucket as we went. The bemused fishermen waved goodbye and we turned around to face a wall of green. You could have told me we had landed in Indonesia, it was so humid. And the fisherman was right—it was a good day for sandflies, and they got their fill from any bare skin we had left them.

TOP LEFT View above Lake Liz base camp.  
TOP RIGHT Ana Richards enjoying the mist at the base of the Tusk.  
FACING PAGE Liz Oh crossing the lake outlet of the Sinbad Gully waterfall.  
BELOW Rosie Hohnen and Ana Richards investigating the marbled slabs below the Llawrenny Peaks



We bivvied half way along a stoat-trapping track. Ana felt at home, being a stoat-trapper in Fiordland for her work. The next day, it was all gung-ho up the vertical, vegetated spur of hell, outrunning the 50mm rain forecast. We did not want to get stuck on the spur—a mere ten metres wide in some spots, with sheer drops on both sides. For hours we scrambled up wet slabs, waterfalls, flax and tussock. We hauled ourselves up, with our backpacks pulling us down. It was a battle between us and the plants, a full body experience.

In parts, the terrain became overhanging. We pulled ourselves up huge flax plants, digging our boots into the vegetation—as if kicking into ice with crampons. At one point, we discussed actually putting them on. When our packs were too dangerous to wear whilst soloing up a wet corner of rock, Liz set up an anchor made from the roots of a bush, digging mud out from under it to thread a rope. Mid-afternoon came and we found ourselves still scrambling up the spur as the mist rolled in.

Before dark we got to some flats nearer the top of the spur, with enough time to set up camp behind some knolls. It wasn't an ideal place to stop. As we settled in for sleep, the rain began its deluge. Submerged in water, the guy-lines were impossible to re-pin. We used rocks and ice-axes instead. Then the wind picked up, roaring across the headwall before smashing into our tiny tents. We used all of our body weight to keep the tents from blowing off the mountain. As day broke, we surveyed the damage: snapped tent poles, ripped tents, wet everything.

As the forecast predicted, the sun did come out, so we dried our gear and continued up tussock and slabs to the top of the Sinbad Gully spur to camp and prepare for the start of the traverse from the Llawrenny Peaks area to our first stop at Lake Liz, below The Tusk.

We used a mixture of topographic maps and GPS, but could never guess how much scrambling, climbing and rappelling would be required. The terrain changed from hard granite to gigantic, unstable loose blocks. High-stakes scrambling became our buzz words. It was safer to have a little distance between each other, in case we dislodged a rock—which did happen occasionally. At one point, a large rock came hurtling down towards Rosie. With the sun in her eyes, she ducked away from the sound of the falling rock, which in turn dislodged another. On all sides, the terrain dropped for hundreds of metres into the cirques and valleys below. We made a couple of rappels. Having forgotten our rap tat, we slung a small horn with a prusik and placed a purple Totem cam as a backup. The horn was cracked and moved a little, but it was the best we could find. Nothing our mothers would be proud of, but safe enough. Rosie went over the edge, throwing off loose rocks, to an unknown and somewhat unseeable ledge. As we each followed, we kept a close eye on that prusik. The second rappel involved making another anchor, again in less than ideal rock. Rosie rappelled first, off a slabby section onto another ledge from where we could continue scrambling unroped. We all rappelled down with our backpacks hanging between our legs. Rosie placed some gear so that Liz, the last person down, could dismantle the anchor and at least down climb on ground belay ... except that in my haste, I missed clipping the gear on my rappel and left Liz to down climb the entire slab with no clipped pro. Sorry Liz! It's a good thing Liz is as solid as they come.

After a 12-hour day of scrambling through a mixture of terrain—knife-edge ridges, snow, ice, slabs, loose rock and tussock—we finally made it down to Lake Liz to set up basecamp with The Tusk, ominous, above us.

The weather changed from sunshine to torrential rain. Visibility shrunk to literally a few metres as waterfalls cascaded down the faces above us, filling the lake. It was never a guarantee we would climb The Tusk, let alone even make it as far as we did. We waited, huddled under a tarp in the pouring rain, holding on to the news that we had a small weather window coming. It was possibly our only chance, as there was rumour of 162mm of rain to follow. We did not know if we'd continue with the traverse, so The Tusk truly became the focus.

Waiting out bad weather, we bouldered and rappelled down into Lake Liz's water outlet—a series of deep chasms. We explored a rocky outcrop called Kakapo Castle, an old research base, by climbing some old fixed ropes to the top—where we found them wrapped around a rock, with moss growing through the rope and with kea chew marks.



Finally, the night before climbing day arrived. It was still misty and wet, but Liz and Rosie packed their climbing gear, ready for a dawn wake-up. Morning came and went. No one even attempted to leave their tent, the wind so fierce you couldn't stand. As Liz put it, you had to literally sit in the tussock so you didn't pee all over yourself. We were devastated, but climbing 600 metres up a rock face no one had climbed before was instantly out of the question. The worst thing was that it was bluebird.

At 2pm, the wind finally eased. Against logic, maybe, Liz and Rosie roped up with significantly less time than they'd like, with no idea how they would get down. Leaving this late meant it was very possible they'd have to find their descent off the backside in the dark. The rappel looked loose, overhanging and dangerous.

Liz took the first lead. As she climbed, it became apparent that the rock was not good. Bits crumbled and broke in her hands. Plates flexed. Nowhere to put pro. Liz ran it out until she got to a flake, placing a questionable piece. Deciding to quest left, away from the arête to where the rock appeared better, she found the rock was just as bad—fused seams, flaring cracks. This was only the first pitch.

Following the first two pitches, a stretch of vertical tussock was safer to solo. We watched Liz and Rosie make their way up the vertical ridge, often without ropes, until they reached a pinnacle feature half way along the ridge. Basecamp at Lake Liz lay to their left, a cascading waterfall and Mount Danger to their right, and behind them the glimmering Tasman Sea. All to themselves.

Their rack was light—a handful of Totems and some nuts—as they had a suspicion the rock would be bad, and so took little. They continued on, making anchors in average rock but often choosing to climb solo due to

the poor quality. As the afternoon waned, we lost sight of them, leaving them to their own devices and decision-making. There was no talk of what would happen if they couldn't find a safe way down. They had little option but to work it out.

Liz and Rosie summited just before dark, then worked quickly to rappel. This included a traverse along the tops to where the cliff was closer to the ground (loose rubble that plummeted steeply down into the valley). Their descent involved navigating and slinging blocks to rappel. They roped up for a traverse pitch to get to a better section, having seen that their initial route was taking them to overhanging cliffs. At dark, they made it down to the rubble, then traversed the slabs below.

Liz and Rosie completed a 600m climb, starting from a feature named Kakapo's Castle to the summit of The Tusk. They aptly named their route *Kakapo Crest* (16) in honour of the rare majestic parrot. In total, they roped up for four pitches. It was faster to solo and much of the rock didn't provide good protection.

With broken tents and a forecast for 162mm rain, low visibility and high winds, it felt foolish to attempt further travel along the high peaks to finish the traverse. The trip had taken almost a year to plan, and that night we felt the weight of our decision. We tried to soften our disappointment with the knowledge that there was always next summer, and the belief that our full objective can be achieved with a longer weather window.

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TOP Ana Richards and the author exploring a ridge line, with Terror Peak in the background. SIMON BISCHOFF

ABOVE Liz Oh and Rosie Hohnen making a first climbing ascent of *Kakapo Crest* on The Tusk.



# EXTEND YOUR SEASON

Ever had the feeling the ski season in New Zealand is too short? That the period between dodging rocks in the early season and dodging rocks in the late season is only a month long? Ski touring isn't just a great way of accessing more remote alpine terrain in winter, it is a burgeoning activity in its own right and a way to extend the ski season beyond resort closure for the more adventurous snow sports participants.

If you felt this year's season was over before you even got your skins out, here are three overseas ski touring destinations with epic snow that you might not have heard of or considered visiting.

 Touring up to Torrecillas, Argentina, while the 'Eye of Sauron' looks on. PATRICK CLISSOLD



# RISHIRI, JAPAN

BY MARY-ROSE BLACKLEY

**PERSEVERANCE IS** required just to get onto Japan's northern-most ski touring destination, Rishiri Island. The Heartland Ferry cancels when the sea swell exceeds three metres, as it had been the days before our arrival. Embarking on a 96-metre boat that is covered in rime ice ten centimetres thick, with a -15 °C air temperature, reminded me somewhat of the Titanic—just before she went down.

In broken English, the guides greeted us upon arrival with instructions to dress warmly. Minutes later we were being towed by skidoo, at speed, our frozen fingers desperately clinging to a water-ski rope handle, as we made our way towards the lower slopes of Mt Rishiri (1721 metres).

Jane Morris, a New Zealand alpine guide, had recommended Rishiri Island to us as her favourite Japanese ski touring location. FOMO ate away. We had to know why.

Why travel so far, when the Asahidake, Kurodake, Tokachidake, Kamui Links, Furano, Hakkoda and all those other smaller resorts with incredible touring opportunities had previously satisfied our time and budget constraints? Over the years, we had noticed the increased numbers of foreigners touring in Japan. We had also observed how resorts like Furano, which had previously penalised people ducking under their ropes, now saw it as an opportunity to attract business to their resort. Some would say there is no need to go backcountry touring when there is ample untracked powder within the ski boundary.

Being well past the Niseko age group, nor likely to enjoy the school kids at Teine, we wanted unrestricted powder skiing without chair lift queues. As the Asahikawa region is known for its annual six-plus metres of snowfall, lower temperatures, the \$35 to \$80 day passes and the lack of crowds, it made the international air ticket a worthwhile investment. If one were to measure the vertical downhill against dollars invested, Hokkaido could easily win. However, constantly having to sneak under resort boundary ropes felt so naughty and disrespectful. One could argue that it should be prohibited to fence off pristine powder too.

Known throughout the ski touring fraternity, Rishiri remains an expert ski touring location due to the isolation factor and steep slopes on the dormant volcano. Mt Rishiri is not a place for the 'learn-to-tour-amateurs'. You need to arrive with your own equipment and be powder kick-turn savvy. Whilst teetering on steep slopes, our flailing arms and skis in waist-deep dry snow was an inefficient use of our energy in order to change direction. We quickly observed to dig half the downhill ski, from heel to binding, under the uphill ski to enable a swift kick turn.

In early February, we only needed skins and ski crampons for the exposed ridgelines. Our New Zealand ski touring clothing was totally inadequate. To ski downhill, we had to double our down and merino layers. Wearing Gore-Tex hoods over our helmets also kept the body heat retained. During our four days, -35°C was our coldest windchill test. We wilfully opted for the onsen after five hours each day. The Siberian snow-loaded winds were partly why we were there, so we had to toughen up.

Because of the volcano's cone shape, there is always somewhere with less wind. The JMGA Rishiri guides take you to the easily accessible sheltered aspects, where the powder has accumulated. They know which slopes are prone to avalanche, where wind loading is detrimental to slope stability and where the run out is safe. Comparing them to the European, American and New Zealand guides, we found the Rishiri guides were the most cautious we had ever toured with. Most importantly, they always located the best snow for the least amount of effort.

For me, it was the first time I had experienced skiing downhill whilst choking. This was due to the bottomless depth of the powder. Maybe I shouldn't have been yahooing so loudly.

As you skin up past the tree line, the resilient bamboo undergrowth seems to hold onto every aspect. As with other Hokkaido touring locations, there is no need for the high-altitude expense, heavy packs or longer climbs. With a 15-metre average snowfall, Rishiri is slightly warmer and second to the Asahikawa region for snow depth and temperatures. At the end of each Rishiri day, we skied down to the ice-covered coastline.

The 20- to 30-minute skidoo tow saved us two to three hours skinning uphill for the first 500 metres. It cost 2000 to 3000 Yen (\$26.42 to \$39.63) in cash each day. The cost varied depending on the tow distance. However, after a day's touring, the skate-ski tuck down the narrow skidoo tracks to the road was an added bonus.

We had unlimited visibility on our last day and we could see Hokkaido, and what we imagined to be Russia. Our guides had decided to take us as high as possible. Matching us with similar ability tourers, although all Japanese, meant we enjoyed their comradeship and jokes whilst we reciprocated with sharing some kiwi expressions. We appreciated not being grouped in with the other English speakers, realising we were fortunate to get the local Japanese perspective. However, after an 800 metre morning climb, we then skied down a 300 metre steep couloir which tested the fitness and nerves. Unable to share a common language made no difference to our group's success and thrill of the moment. The nearer the peak of this stratovolcano, the steeper the skiing.



Summitting Mt Rishiri starts in late March/early April. Notorious ice and wind-loaded cornices prevent most from ski descending from the actual peak. There is a cabin close to the top that spring tourers can sleep in, getting the sunrise before the ski down. In April dawn starts at 4.30am, so fresh powder is available before lunch.

Being in a non-touristy location meant no warm cafes to rest and recover in; our brief lunch stops were spent huddling under trees. Our seaweed-wrapped rice balls (onigiri), bean paste cakes and pork dumplings were delicious and restored our demanding energy requirements. To prevent frozen, crunchy onigiri, we learnt to keep the food close to our core. We noted the guides all carried a hot thermos with ramen noodles.

Whilst enduring such cold daytime temperatures, we looked forward to our evening onsen. It is an unusual custom meeting fellow tourers whilst naked. However, the Japanese tradition of scrubbing up and soaking in a shared hot tub with the same gender became our regular après ski activity. It was an opportunity to mix with the other touring groups who were mostly from Japan, Europe and Canada.

We wondered why these other tourers had come to Rishiri, especially if Canadians had unlimited backcountry touring and plentiful snow. Apparently, we had all come for similar reasons, mostly wanting to experience the real Japanese culture away from raucous ski tourists and to ski unrestricted powder. Tourers are different anyway. They don't depend on chairlifts, enjoy their own company and appreciate mother nature's challenges.

From a five-to six-month snow-covered lifestyle, the 4600 local islanders must appreciate the spring thaw and summer warmth. It was difficult for us to imagine the transformation, if it wasn't for the marketing images of the prolific wildflowers and wildlife hatching that were used to promote the region in summer. Rishiri is also known as a summer surfing, trekking, fishing, cycling and bird-watching destination. The seasonal transformation must be incredible to witness. We heard the constant surf is as good if not better than the snow skiing.

Such climatic diversity and resourcefulness made the locals very different to other rural Japanese we had met. There is a simplistic rural island attitude, where their survival skills make them interestingly independent, where nature controls mankind. Above all, we observed a supreme respect for their environment, which is less common in larger ski resorts. Our initial need for perseverance was well rewarded. I support keeping Rishiri a secret for the more determined hard core backcountry skiers. Visiting Rishiri became a greater memory than just ski touring. It ticked all our less crowded wilderness boxes. The local's friendly informality and the terrain made us just want to return for a longer summer cycling tour.

*Special thanks to Hiromi Nakata (Japanese translator), images courtesy of Toshiyo Watanabe.*

## TRAVEL OPTIONS:

-The **train** to Wakkanai from Sapporo takes 5.5 hours and has four carriages. It is a ten minute walk from the train station to the ferry terminal. The **JR Train Pass** is the least expensive option for overseas travellers. This pass must be bought outside of Japan. Depending on the exchange rate, a Hokkaido four-day flexi pass/ten days is about \$200. -Daily **flights** to Wakkanai or Rishiri leave from Sapporo. The plane is described as a smaller propeller plane.

-The **Heartland Ferry** to Rishiri Island runs two to three times a day, takes 100 minutes and is 2500 yen (NZ\$37.50).

-**Winter** touring can be booked by contacting Explore & Share ([www.explore-share.com](http://www.explore-share.com)), or directly to [toshiya@maruzen.com](mailto:toshiya@maruzen.com).

-**Guided ski touring** at Rishiri was established in 2014 by Toshiya Watanabe. There are three to four JMGA Level 2 guides.

-**Accommodation:** Pension Rera Moshir ([www.maruzen.com/tic/oyado/index.html](http://www.maruzen.com/tic/oyado/index.html)) offers onsen, restaurant, airport and boat transfers, drying room and clothes washing facilities. Built in 2011, the large bedrooms have ensuite and tea-making facilities.

-**Winter Temperature:** the daytime minimum average is -12°C. The maximum average is 8°C.



# SOUTH AMERICA

WORDS AND IMAGES BY  
PATRICK CLISSOLD

**ONE OF** the things I told myself when I moved to New Zealand was that I wouldn't take a trip abroad for at least a year in order to spend time exploring this amazing country, but after the year had ended I started to get itchy feet. Picking up a map of the world, I realised that South America was a lot more accessible than it was from the UK. I found that a two or three week South America trip provides dramatic landscapes, remote tours, and impressive lines for all abilities—with truly welcoming locals offering decent red wine and world class steak to boot.

In July 2017, with an old friend from the UK, John Vincent, I decided to investigate the ski mountaineering possibilities in the Chilean Andes, just outside Santiago. He was now a teacher in Lima, Peru, and only had two weeks' leave, so we didn't want to spend days and days travelling. Luckily, you can hit the snowline with a two-hour drive from downtown Santiago, though we had no other plans besides that.

I had a day to spare before John arrived, so I visited the Instituto Geografico Militar (IGM) in Santiago. Here you can browse and buy 1:50,000 topographical maps of all areas of Chile. The two areas that instantly jumped out at me were Cerro El Plomo and Volcan San Jose. Very close to Santiago and with amazing, remote, yet fairly accessible terrain, we had found our objectives for the next two weeks.



TOP The author in the Cerro Del Plomo valley, Chile.  
LEFT Basecamp below Cerro Del Plomo.

## CERRO EL PLOMO, CHILE

Two hours east of Santiago are three connected ski resorts: El Colorado, Valle Nevado and La Parva. They provide an excellent few days' warm-up and access to some great day tours. After a few days in Farellones, and picking up the third member of our team Katie Bowen, we decided to camp in the Valle del Cepo, on the south side of the area's namesake, Cerro El Plomo, the largest mountain in the area.

We planned to make a basecamp at the Refugio Agostini hut (4617m) which, on the map, looks like a day from La Parva. We soon realised that we had bit off more than we could chew and ended up camping on the valley floor at about 3800m. Looking at the snow pack, we decided that the snow looked pretty wind-stripped above 4000m, so we spent the next three days skiing choice lines up and down the valley. The nights were bitterly cold, reaching -10°C inside our small tent. However once the sun hit, it was scorching. We had the whole valley to ourselves and we felt truly remote. This with only a day's tour from the one of the most crowded ski resorts in South America.

One memorable moment was stepping out onto a slope, only for a massive crack to appear in the snow, extending out from the tips of my skis and paired with an almighty whumping sound. This was a surprise considering the reasonable terrain, stable weather patterns and snowpack we'd observed so far. Needless to say, we backed away carefully and found a safer route around, but it provided a great lesson that we should not get too complacent.

## VOLCAN SAN JOSE, CHILE

Next we headed southeast of Santiago to the San Jose de Maipo valley. With condors circling above, we drove up one of the most scenic roads I've seen, with towering contorted cliffs. We reached the valley split at Bañon Morales. Here we toured for around eight hours up the northern valley to the Refugio Volcan San Jose hut, which was half-buried in snow. Digging our way to the front door was worth the effort as it provided a great basecamp. The summits of the surrounding mountains are over 6000m and, as is the case in most of the Andes, conditions were very windswept and icy above 4000m. We spent the next few days skiing lines in the sweet spot, between 3000m and 4000m, where we found some of the best snow conditions I've skied in; deep powder, blue skies, and we were the only people on the mountain. The nights again were bitterly cold, but at least with room to move about in the hut, it made peeing in a bottle a lot easier.



TOP John skiing a choice line on Volcan San Jose, Chile.  
RIGHT Refugio Volcan San Jose, Chile.



## LAS LEÑAS, ARGENTINA

With the success of the previous year, John and I decided to meet up again in 2018, and explore the Argentinian side of the Andes. This time we were joined by my wife Eleri and another good friend from the UK, Tom Laws. We extended the trip to three weeks, agreed to meet up in Mendoza, and again made very few plans beyond that.

There are numerous ski resorts in the region. However the biggest is Las Leñas, which is around a five-hour drive south of Mendoza. Basing ourselves here for a week, there were numerous possibilities for day tours and overnights.

One of the obvious goals was a prominent pinnacle of rock called 'The Gendarme' on Cerro Leñas. Taking the tent, we toured from the end of the road, a spot where locals hurl themselves down black ice slopes at break neck speed on tea trays at the weekend. We found a good camping spot about 2km further along up the mountain. The next day, we attempted to reach the gendarme on the ridge. As we approached, dark clouds started to roll in and it began to snow heavily. We retreated back to the tent. The weather continued to worsen. This front wasn't forecast and, worried we may end up facing avalanche-prone terrain in uncertain weather conditions, we packed up and made a hasty retreat.

The next day, the weather improved and we decided to explore some lines on the incredibly impressive Torrecillas. This mountain is easily toured from the top lift of Las Leñas and consists of awe inspiring granite spires, one of which we dubbed Sauron, due to the imposing eye-shaped hole through the middle of it. Here we enjoyed the best snow conditions yet, with fluffy powder, and fantastic terrain.

LEFT Eleri touring up to Torrecillas, Argentina.



## CAJON GRANDE, ARGENTINA

South of Mendoza is the town of Malargue. From here we drove west towards the sleepy village of Las Loicas, the gateway to the Cajon Grande. Here there's a small run-down campground and huts owned by the same family who own the café in Las Loicas. For a very reasonable price, we clung to the roof of their 4x4, and with their kids and dogs in tow, bounced across a few kilometres of tundra to the camp.

With countless peaks and ridges lining the valley and an almost infinite amount of lines, we spent the next four days exploring the valley and finishing the days soaking in 40°C natural hot pools. The only trouble was that you never wanted to get out with such cold temperatures outside.

**LEFT** The naturally occurring hot pools of the Cajon Grande make for excellent recovery sessions.

**BOTTOM** Refugio Frey at dawn, northern Patagonia.

## BARILOCHE, ARGENTINA

Unfortunately, Eleri and John only had two weeks and, with an extra week to play with, Tom and I decided to test our novice Spanish skills and go it alone, driving 14 hours south to San Carlos de Bariloche. This is the first major location in northern Patagonia and a mecca for big ski lines. For those wanting to do a specific Patagonia tour, this would be a great place to fly into. While the resort of Cerro Catedral offers plenty of groomed runs, what drew us here were the backcountry possibilities from the Refugio Frey. Tom and I had seen this in ski films, and its iconic location, nestled in a high valley and surrounded by sharp granite spires, had captured our imagination. There are two ways in: touring from the resort, or a summer walking track that went the long way, but avoided avalanche terrain. There had been bad weather the previous week, so we opted for the four-hour hike through gorgeous pine forest and subalpine terrain. When we arrived, the view was as good as we had imagined and we were surrounded by steep, intimidating ski lines, most of which looked well beyond our capability. However, on closer inspection, there were plenty of easier options that we skied for the next few days.

The hut is quite small, sleeping around 30 people, but it has three live-in wardens, who spend their days skiing and evenings making everyone pizza and drinking Malbec. A hard life.

After a few days of skiing some incredible lines, it was time to leave and we decided—as the avalanche conditions had eased off—we would tour back along the high route to the ski resort. The two to three hours of pleasant touring we had imagined turned out to be a seven-hour terror-fest, which resembled more a mountaineering climbing route than a tour, with exposed and consequential lines crossing 50°+ ice slopes. We eventually crossed over the final ridge and dropped into the blue slopes of the resort to join the snake lines of children happily skiing and laughing. If ever a day showed the contrast of the two ends of the skiing spectrum, it was today.



### FLIGHTS

LATAM fly directly from Auckland to Santiago, which is only 11 hours there and 13 hours back. You can also hop over with them to Mendoza, which takes another 1.5 hours. Alternatively, you can fly with Air New Zealand to Mendoza via Buenos Aires, which takes around 17 hours. I found LATAM to be just as good as any other airline, however they annoyingly charge USD\$100 for skis each way if they are over 158cm.

All flights to Bariloche go via Buenos Aires.

### TRAVEL

We did some of the Chile trip by public transport and found it quite time-consuming. By far the easiest way to get about is to hire a car. Three week's hire in Argentina cost about \$1800 and we managed to squeeze in four people.

### ACCOMMODATION

When touring we carried a tent, and used huts where they existed. Accommodation at the resorts is expensive in Chile; even a hostel bed in La Parva cost \$120 a night. The Argentinian side was cheap by comparison with a bunk costing about \$20 a night.

### EQUIPMENT

You can get most outdoor gear in shops in both Santiago and Mendoza. Although we struggled with specific ski touring equipment, I wouldn't recommend replacing a dynafit binding with cable ties.

### GUIDEBOOK

Two books well worth checking out are *The Andes*; *A guide for Climbers* by John Bigger and *Chile-Argentina, Handbook of Ski Mountaineering in the Andes* by Frederic Lena.



## GULMARG, KASHMIR

WORDS AND IMAGES BY  
JOHN ROPER-LINDSAY

**IN JANUARY** this year, John Henson, Grant Piper and I (Canterbury/Westland section) spent a couple of weeks 'slackcountry' ski touring in Gulmarg, Kashmir. Skiing in Kashmir may sound pretty intrepid, but I should point out that rather than getting there via donkeys over high altitude passes and digging snow caves, we flew into Srinagar and joined 20 other skiers, plus five guides, staying in a very comfortable hotel.

Bill Barker runs the trips, and he has a great love of Kashmir and Gulmarg and was involved in setting up the area as well as the training of Kashmiri ski patrol from the early 2000s. Gulmarg is a couple of hours' drive from Srinagar and, at about 2600m, is a former bolthole for the British escaping the heat of an Indian summer. So there are a lot of older big houses, a golf course and, since 1998, a gondola that goes up to about 4000m. The busy season is summer, when there can be two-hour queues for the gondola, and it has been a battle just to get the gondola to open during winter. On one side of Gulmarg, the local mountains rise to just over 4200m, and on the other is a wide valley with views to the Himalaya.

The skiing is based around the gondola, but most people take ski touring gear to extend the possibilities. Grooming is virtually non-existent. In the first days we were there, we saw only a handful of other skiers, although Indians are starting to visit in winter. They ride up to the mid-station and take snowmobile trips, get hauled around on toboggans by Kashmiris and, of course, take selfies in the snow.

The snow was epic. In this area it tends to fall with little wind, so lies pretty evenly on the ridges and in the bowls. With so few skiers around, there were fresh lines to be found everywhere, even a week after the last snowfall. In January, at 4000m, it felt pretty chilly (colder than July ski days in NZ, but not by much) and temperatures were low enough to keep the snow in condition for many days on all but the sunniest aspects. It's not Canada-cold, but cold enough!

For our group, a typical day started by skiing and hiking to the gondola, where protracted negotiations about tickets took place. In addition to the Western guides, three of whom were Kiwis Mark Sedon, Dean Staples and Elliot James, each group of four skiers usually had a Kashmiri guide who helped with discussions and also skied at the back to mop up any crashes. I put this to the test on the first run of day one, when I failed to click into my tech bindings correctly and the first turn shot one ski 500m down the mountain. It's impressive how ski brakes don't do much in real powder.

**ABOVE** The Gulmarg region has great snow and terrain for making fresh turns.

**BELOW** The army camp at 4000m, with dog tracks sprawling out ominously...

After a ride to the top of the mountain, sometimes we put on the skins immediately to skin up to one of the nearby peaks. These were only at most 200m higher, but gave access to a whole new range of bowls and seriously long runs, some of which involved a 15km skin followed by a 30-minute taxi ride back to Gulmarg.

If we didn't skin up one of the peaks, skiing was a gentle glide from the top of the gondola on the ridgeline for up to 2km before selecting one of the ridges or bowls to turn onto. The 'gentle glide' was spiced up quite a bit by passing an Indian army camp, which had a big selection of bored, underfed dogs that went into attack mode at the sight of us. Nobody wanted to be the last one in the line, so it made for some fairly competitive poling from the skiers and tricky moments for the snowboarders. One day we descended over 2000m through a valley to a local village, where we had afternoon tea in a local house. A real privilege, as Grant said.

Avalanche risk was pretty high. During the two weeks we were there, there was over 1.8m of new snow. Most of the drop-ins to the bowls were at the perfect angle not to release on their own, but would go with any





skier weight. So there was often quite a bit of skiing down the wide ridges. The avalanche control and patrolling was of a really high standard and our guides were familiar with the conditions, so you always felt you were skiing safely, but still on challenging terrain. Occasionally a guide would do a ski cut at the top of a bowl, and that would be enough to convince us that ridge skiing was quite good enough, thank you.

Digging a snow pit to check snow conditions on day two was a bit sobering. The pit had to be over 2m-deep, and the failure during testing was about 1.7m deep. Some of the patrol bombing had also set off slopes down to this level, which is a serious amount of snow. And this was before any of the big snowfall that happened while we were there. Fortunately, Gulmarg has a lot of pine trees at lower elevations that were great during the big dumps, without the tree wells that are so dangerous in Canadian tree skiing. So we did a lot of laps in the trees, trying to avoid crashing into one as the thigh-deep snow blew into our faces. Some of these runs ended up too far away to skin back, so we'd take a taxi. Crammed into a Mahindra 2WD SUV that bounced around on the snowy road between two metre-high banks of snow while listening to Kashmiri music was a great way to get back to the next run. At least our taxis had chains, which wasn't always the case. An interesting compromise we observed was just to have a chain on one wheel, presumably to save on chain rental costs. Needless to say, it wasn't a great success.

The skiing was special in its own right, but even the most blinkered ski enthusiast felt that being in Kashmir took it to a new level. Although it's a holiday area, with few Kashmiris actually living there, we still felt we ended up with an appreciation of authentic Kashmiri life. From the food to the calls to prayer echoing off the mountains, you were always aware you were in a different culture. Kashmiri men are quite fierce looking, and nearly all wear traditional long woollen cloaks (pherans). They are friendly, and very proud.

In Gulmarg we never saw any Kashmiri women. All the jobs were done by men, including all hotel and restaurant work. It's a hard life. Men make the one-hour journey from the nearest village every day by bus, then spend a couple of hours walking up to the gondola mid-station and pulling up their toboggan on the chance of making a couple of dollars pulling around a wealthy Indian. It's good to know that much of the money spent on our holiday was going to Kashmiris, directly or indirectly, whether it was taxi drivers, guides, skifield

**TOP** Chaos on the roads was common, with many vehicles equipped with chains on only one wheel.

**MIDDLE** With few skiers, untracked snow was accessible even close to the gondola.

**BOTTOM** Gulmarg offers the kind of powder and tree skiing just not available in New Zealand. BILL'S TRIPS

workers or the staff working at the mini-village in our hotel. Gulmarg does have one new five-star hotel, which looks the same as five-star hotels all over the world. In contrast, ours was very traditional, with cabins spaced throughout the forest. Each room was serviced by quite a few smartly-dressed men who kept everything very tidy and, most importantly, looked after the wooden stove in each room. Having someone sneak into the room at 5am to top up the stove so it was cosy when we got up was a major luxury that took a surprisingly short time to get used to. Eating a wide range of superb curries every evening also didn't seem out of place on a ski holiday. You can stay cheaply in Gulmarg, but most of the hotels are shut during the winter, so there's not a big choice.

A slightly unusual experience for us was that two of our fellow clients had pre-planned to get married in Gulmarg in the local Anglican church, which didn't seem to have seen much use since the British left in 1947. We were all invited, and since the skiing conditions that afternoon weren't ideal, there was 100 per cent turnout. We were all dressed in the pherans, each with a basket of warm ashes (Kangri) held underneath the cloak to keep warm in the unheated church. The whole occasion fascinated the locals and a number stood in the back of the church, and then every newspaper in India had an article about it (google 'Gulmarg wedding skiing'). But the crowning moment was finishing a 2000m descent from the top of the gondola to a small village at the road end to be met by a TV crew wanting to interview the bride and groom. Even President Modi referred to it.

I can't write about Kashmir skiing without commenting on the political situation. Prior to 1989, tourism in Kashmir was huge, and although it started growing a little since 2009, the numbers are still low. This has had a big impact on the Kashmir economy. We were there before the latest conflicts, but we were constantly aware of the tension, with Indian army posts every few hundred metres along the road. Right now it's hard to imagine skiing in Gulmarg again, but when it next becomes safe to visit Kashmir, put it on your list. You might be like me and have the best skiing experience of your life. 



**ABOVE** The pheran-wearing author (right) holding a kangri outside the Anglican church at the wedding.

**BELOW** View across Dal Lake, Srinagar.





**CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2019 SERIES WINNERS:**

**OPEN FEMALE**

- 1st Erica Gatland – 286 points
- 2nd Sarah Hay – 222 points
- 3rd Rebecca Hounsell – 198 points

**OPEN MALE**

- 1st Rob Gajland – 234 points
- 2nd Lans Hansen- 204 points
- 3rd Lucas Dowell – 186 points

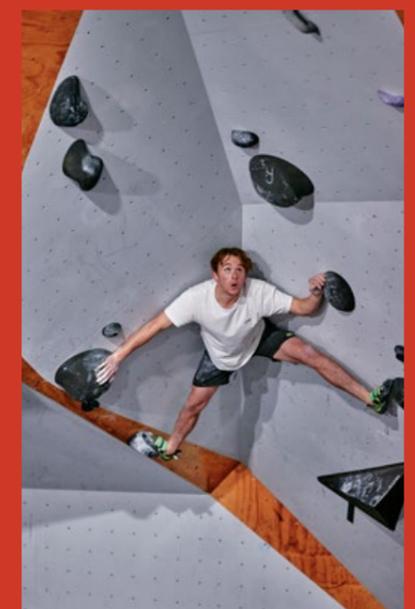
For the full results, including the male and female series winners for the Youth and Masters categories, visit: [www.nibs.nz](http://www.nibs.nz)

The very successful National Indoor Bouldering Series continues to grow. This year's series again set a new record for participants, perhaps aided by two of the four rounds being hosted in brand new, state-of-the-art bouldering facilities: Auckland's Northern Rocks and the new Uprising gym in Christchurch.

Thanks to all the participants, the volunteers, the series sponsors, the route setters, the gyms and especially to Sefton Priestley who pulls it all together and makes this series such a popular event on the winter calendar.

All photos from the final round, held in Christchurch at Uprising. TOM HOYLE

**NZAC NATIONAL INDOOR BOULDERING SERIES**



# WHAT'S IN YOUR FIRST AID KIT, DOC?

By Dr. Robin Barraclough

## First Aid.

'The immediate assistance that one provides to another person suffering from illness or some kind of injury.' For me, whether you're climbing, tramping or mountain biking, first aid is about having a degree self-sufficiency in dealing with a simple slip, trip or fall when you're out and about. I'm going to offer some thoughts around what (and why) you might carry in a basic personal outdoor first aid kit.

It's worth remembering that first aid is a relatively modern idea in the scheme of things. Standards in healthcare and hygiene began to significantly improve at the end of the 19th century. Around this time, people realised that much of the losses and suffering caused by war injuries could be minimised to some extent if simple life and limb-saving procedures could be taught or trained to willing volunteers. This is how organisations like the Red Cross and St John came to be the ones we know and trust with this subject today.

But ask 20 different people what's in a first aid kit and I suspect they might all give you slightly different answers.

For many climbers, their first aid kits might only include a minimal pocket knife and a roll of tape, which, in many respects, is a legitimate choice. I know some that use their first aid kit as a repository for a cheeky emergency chocolate stash, while others might include an awful lot more stuff to deal with those 'but what if X happens' emergencies.

Which brings us to an important point. The kit you carry should mirror the hazard and risk of an issue occurring, balanced against the needs of the endeavour being undertaken and the level of risk an individual is prepared to accept.

Perhaps this is easier to explain with an example. In Alex Honnold's 2017 free solo of *Freerider* in Yosemite, a first aid kit was totally superfluous to his requirements.

In preparation for the ascent, Alex obviously came to terms with and understood the magnitude of the risks he was taking on, and was clearly prepared to accept them. What one individual deems an acceptable risk might be very different to another, which is the reason why getting a consensus on what one might want or need to take can be a tough call to make.

To make use of a first aid kit on a trip, you obviously have to be carrying it with you, and if the kit is ginormous and weighs a tonne, it is going to start causing more problems than it solves. Also, first aid is just that—to stabilise an issue that either sorts itself out, or manages it until the cavalry arrives. So while there are exceptions to everything, it is those simple common injuries that the average outdoor man or woman should plan for, such as the slip, trip or fall. A kit for such could be assembled by thinking: 'What is the minimum I might sensibly get away with here?'

It is also probably worth mentioning that a personal first aid kit is not necessarily for group or expedition use. Medical provision for a team or group of people is a different kettle of fish, and places an entirely different slant on what items are carried and why, and who might be providing the care.

Broadly, a good personal first aid kit should tick the following boxes:

- Lightweight
- Life and limb-saving
- Low cost
- Lots of uses

For these reasons, I enjoy making my own first aid kit. I think it's also more effective if you have put it together yourself, as it gives you a bit more ownership. Plus, 'curating' your own bespoke kit is fun and for real outdoor nerds. It can even get quite competitive. My own first aid box, two-person group shelter and head torch comes in at 430 grams.

Below are two lists, one with items that you might find in a small first aid kit, and one with items that you might be carrying or sharing as part of a trip, but can form part of a first aid response.

## FIRST AID KIT ITEMS:

**Record keeping** - Casualty report form or notebook. I carry a couple of sheets of waterproof paper and a cut down pencil. Useful to record grid references, injury findings and vital signs. Writing things down when your mind is racing is helpful and makes for one less thing to remember.

**Non-adherent dressings** - Useful for wounds and grazes with a light amount of 'leakage'.

**Tape** - Duct tape or micropore tape to secure dressings or other things in place. Duct tape can be used to make bandages or splints, and can prevent sunburn to your nose or blisters on your hands and feet. The near endless uses make it pretty essential.

**A wound dressing** - To put over a bleeding wound and soak up blood. Military ones are good. Sanitary towels/pads also work extremely well. One is usually enough.

**Safety pins** - One or two large ones can secure bandages. Also useful for decompressing blisters.

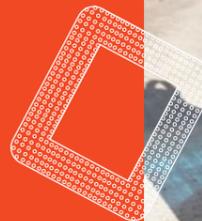
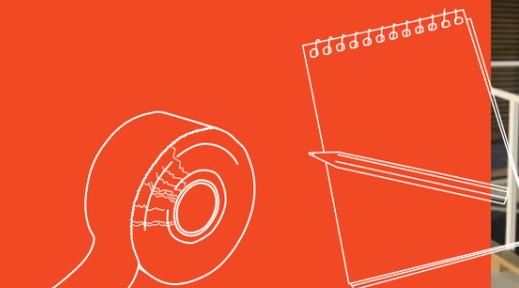
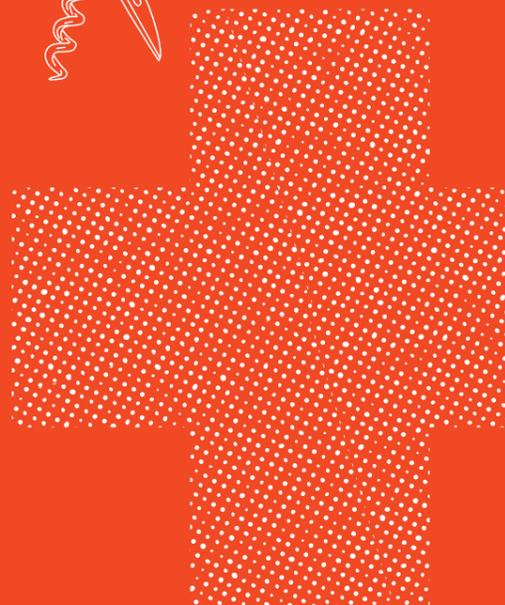
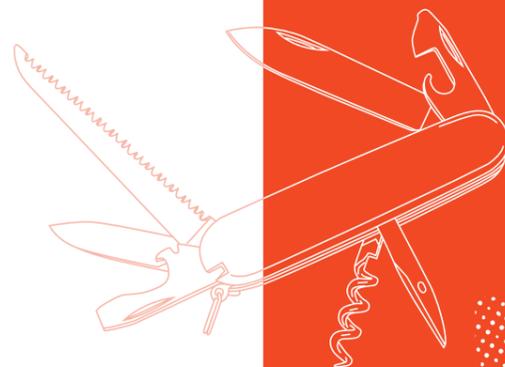
**Blister dressing** - A type of adhesive dressing for use with blisters, sold under the names Compeed, Moleskin etc ... Blister prevention or fixing them early can prevent them ruining a trip.

**A bandage, support bandage or triangular bandage** - Used to hold a dressing in place, splint a limb or provide support to a muscle or a joint. Some clever people now carry a tiny roll of cling film to do all these jobs and more.

**Plasters or Steristrips** - For minor cuts or closing minor wounds.

**Medications** - Simple over-the-counter painkillers like paracetamol and ibuprofen are enough. Antihistamines like loratadine or cetirizine work well against bites or stings. Half a strip of each in a separate bag is all you need. I'd also suggest that for those on medications for long term conditions, a note with the name, dose and timings is useful for others in the party.

**Container** - It is worth giving a little thought to this. Often the container varies according to the activity and the trip. I used to do a lot of caving and carried a tiny first aid kit in



## Plus, 'curating' your own bespoke kit is fun and for real outdoor nerds

a ziplock sandwich bag stuffed between the helmet and its cradle (next to a deformed Mars bar). For tramping or climbing trips, a tiny dry bag can work well as it's flexible and packs easily. Some also have a clear window on the side so you can see what you're after. A tiny plastic food box which is pretty indestructible also works well. It's almost a law of nature that we will fill the space we are given; it's the same with rucksacks and it's the same with containers for first aid kits, so think small and make it work.

## TRIP ITEMS:

**Shelter** - Survival blanket, bivvy bag, group shelter or tent fly.

**Scissors or a blade** - For cutting tape, dressings, or clothes, if necessary, not to mention fighting orcs ... I have a tiny Swiss Army knife (other brands are available) stashed in my first aid kit complete with scissors, tweezers etc ...

**Soft sweets or other food** - Useful for both prevention and treatment. Easy-to-digest food is best for exhausted or hypothermic casualties.

**Torch** - Head torches are useful, though most mobile phones have torches now.

**Sunglasses** - Preventative medicine. I have seen alpinists in enormous amounts of pain and barely able to see after forgetting their sunglasses for a day.

**Lip balm** - Also preventative. Cracked sore lips on a multi-day trip can be really debilitating. Also best not to share (to avoid cold sores).

**Walking poles** - Preventative? Especially useful in river crossings but can also be used for splinting.

There are heaps of additional things that could easily be debated and added to this list, and in some respects, that is part of the point.

I think it's also worth acknowledging that, for many, a phone is also part of their emergency kit. True, they break. True, they don't have signal when you need it. True, they run out of battery when you least want it. Nevertheless, they are ubiquitous and they are having an impact saving lives on an almost daily basis in urban areas. For example, performing Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) can genuinely save a life. Smart phone apps like the 'St John NZ CPR' and the 'AED app', with step-by-step guides to CPR and Automatic Electrical Defibrillation (AED) use, are simple and brilliantly executed. Similarly, the 'GoodSAM App', using a phone's camera to livestream you and the victim to a paramedic, is really starting to change the game in this area. I now carry both these apps on my phone to help me locate the nearest AED and provide a metronome to pace chest compressions when my mind is probably on other things.

Final thought. Although technology may well start having an impact on first aid in the outdoors, it's the ability to problem solve that is probably the most important bit of kit that never really gets a mention. A damaged arm held up by tucking a jacket up over it is quicker and almost as effective as the old triangular bandage and perfectly illustrates this kind of thinking. I would contend that the ability to be creative and flexible when plans, situations and events change is something that goes hand in hand with having great adventures and managing risk well.

Dr Robin Barraclough  
Fellow Royal New Zealand College General Practitioners



Remember the old outdoor bouldering competitions? The National Boulder Series? The Mid-Winter Mantlefest? The Baring Head Rockhop? These events were a great mix of competitive action and social bouldering and are sorely missed by many who enjoy bouldering outside. It has been a few years since those competitions ceased, but this year Flock Hill was host to the rebirth of outdoor bouldering competitions: the Lowe Alpine Flockfest.

The event was organised by bouldering hotshot Erica Gatland, with support from NZAC as well as sponsorship from Lowe Alpine, Flock Hill Lodge, Castle Hill Basin and Ocu. Competitors were set an accessible selection of problems in the vast, labyrinthine Flock Hill and were lucky enough to get a sunny Saturday on 7 September, despite several days of rain and snow during the week. Castle Hill locals were able to show off their mantling skills and sloper suction prowess, while visitors got an easy introduction to the many excellent moderate and difficult problems scattered around the field, as well as useful instruction in the art of brushing and washing holds after climbing.

In the men's category, local frother Alec McCallum fired off the hardest problem set in the competition, *Mortality Sequence* (V11), on just his second attempt. This gave him a substantial early lead over rivals Rob Gajland and Jarrod Alexander, who were unable to reel him in and settled for second and third respectively.

In the women's, Jean Jack completed her recovery from a back injury to take first place, while impressive allrounder Sooji Clarkson took second over Christina Rivett.

After the competition, people adjourned to Flock Hill Lodge for a barbecue and social activities. On the Sunday, participants assisted in the protection of this area by removing more than 25,000 wilding pine seedlings from the surrounding area.

Thanks to all who travelled to attend and contributed to making this a successful event. Follow @flock\_fest on Instagram for future information.



## THE NORTH FACE SUMMIT SERIES FUTURELIGHT L5 LT JACKET AND PANTS

THE NORTH FACE have been making quite an effort to make sure everyone has heard about their new Futurelight technology, which they claim produces the world's most advanced waterproof and breathable fabric. It is easy to understand why. Three-layer fabrics with a Gore-Tex membrane have dominated the waterproof and breathable market for so long that most people don't even consider there to be a viable alternative. All the major outdoor brands have produced outerwear sporting Gore-Tex membrane fabrics, the major differentiation between products being relegated to their fit and particular array of pockets, the presence of pit zips and how well the hood functions. The actual waterproof and breathable performance characteristics of these garments have all been so similar that nobody even really bothers to talk about it.

I've personally owned an array of Gore-Tex-equipped jackets over the years, all of which were suitably waterproof, at least early on in their lifespan. These products were all proven breathable in a lab and, compared to a PVC anorak or oilskin, offer advanced levels of comfort and moisture release. But if you 'run hot' like me, they're not really breathable enough to keep you dry if you are seriously active in a damp New Zealand environment. I've tended to get better use out of a high-performing windproof jacket and softshell pants than a dedicated Gore-Tex shell. Sacrificing a bit of waterproofing for better breathability and agility has made the most sense for me.

I therefore approached The North Face's claims of a new waterproof and breathable technology with a healthy mix of scepticism and curiosity. For a brand as big as The North Face to ditch a long association with Gore-Tex either meant they were really on to something better, or they think they're big enough to be an exception in the shell market. So, which is it?

Futurelight has a membrane produced via a 'nano spinning' process: using 100 per cent recycled polyester fibres and a ridiculously large number of extremely small nozzles to lay the material in a network of nano-level holes. All of which sounds kind of like Gore-tex, but 'nano'. Where this technology differs, is that they can vary the size of the holes, thereby altering the membrane to suit the type of garment they want to produce. So, if you want to make a very lightweight shell that is still waterproof and breathable, then you can. If you want to make a heavier duty fabric with the same performance characteristics for use in a tent, then you can do that too. That, and it *stretches*. This allows the fabric to be used in a much wider range of garments (such as proper-fitting gloves, apparently) and the increased breathability impressively widens the comfortable range in which these garments can be worn.

The Futurelight Summit Series L5 LT jacket and pants weigh in at 600 grams, *together*. They come with tiny little stuff sacks you can pack them into and, given their weight, you can basically always take them along with you. I've never gotten much use out of shell pants. They tend to be restrictive, noisy and generally make me feel like I'm dressed up in a decontamination suit assessing some serious biohazard. I usually wear softshell pants for anything snowy or icy. If it is looking like hard shell pants will be required, then generally things have moved into the 'not fun' zone. I'll throw them in, just in case, but very rarely have to put them on. I thought the Summit Series L5 LT pants would be the same, the advantage being they take up less weight and space in the bottom of my pack. But once I put them on and started using them, that all changed.

The pants are light and thin enough that it is a bit like wearing silk pyjamas (or how I assume they feel). The combination of the weight and the stretch of the fabric means they feel light and unrestrictive, unlike any other shell pants I've tried. I've been in a few situations where I've worried that I might be underdressed in these, but they're as waterproof and windproof as I've needed. I've skied and ice climbed in mine all winter at a higher level of comfort and agility than I've ever experienced. The breathability and general temperature control are impressive. A couple of times I've found myself surprised at my own level of fitness compared to my companions, only to recognise that they are struggling with overheating, more than actual fatigue, and any advantage I might have had

was all down to what I was wearing.

Are they perfect? Well, no. I've found the bright yellow version I have to be quite prone to staining, but in a colour less bright I imagine it would be less of an issue. I am going to assume 'LT' in the name means light. These are impressively light compared to normal Gore-Tex shell pants. But there are no free lunches and these kind of weight savings likely come with a loss of durability. Admittedly, the only holes in mine are from the tips of ice screws and where crampon points have penetrated just above the kevlar crampon patch (which on my large size just doesn't extend high enough for someone as clumsy as me). The only threads that have pulled are in the different softshell material on the outside of the thigh pocket. But I'd still opt for heavier duty softshell pants if I was likely to be grovelling up some chimney on a mixed route or (heaven forbid) bashing through some gnarly scrub, mostly because I like these pants so much that I want them to last for the activities where they're best suited—on energetic objectives above the snowline.

I haven't said much about the jacket, but all the same performance advantages apply. I haven't worn it as much as the pants, but that is because the set I was given to test by The North Face are all the same bright yellow, and as I'm always wearing the pants, if I put the jacket on I look like a 6'2" banana. There is a time and a place for that, and when I'm less worried about looking like a sponsored athlete at the skifield and in need of the enhanced performance of the garments, I have no hesitation in pairing them together.

When The North Face launch the full range on 1 October, I expect they'll also offer similar garments with the same technology in a slightly heavier weight. If you were buying one pair of shell pants in which to do everything for New Zealand conditions, I'd probably opt for those—assuming you'd still get the performance advantage and likely still some weight savings over available alternatives. Performance-wise these lighter models are easily worth the money, so I would choose based on durability needs for the kinds of activities you are likely to do.

**The North Face Summit Series Futurelight L5 LT Pants \$600, Jacket RRP \$700.**

★★★★★

—Tom Hoyle

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## RHINO SKIN SKIN TREATMENT RANGE

**SWEATY SKIN.** For those of us cursed with it, it's a nightmare. No matter how much Friction Labs or chalk with drying agent you cram onto your fingers, by the fifth hold in you've got tips moister than an oyster. Up until now, there was only one option for people with this condition: Antihydral. Sweet, sweet formaldehyd-packed German goodness, originally intended for use by amputees on their stumps—but equally effective for clogging sweat pores on climber's fingers.

But now a new product is available for us to snatch up with our clammy hands: Rhino Skin.

The main benefit of Rhino Skin is the ease of application. You can simply spray it on. It absorbs within a few minutes and you can carry on with your life. Much more appealing than the overnight ordeal of Antihydral. That's right, no more trying to awkwardly explain those suspicious Antihydral stains on the bed sheets.

Rhino Skin make a whole array of products. In the name of science I tested the 'Dry', 'Repair' and 'Performance' creams. 'Performance' and 'Repair' are larger and come in a pump container, while 'Dry' has a spray in the larger sizes.

Disclaimer: I have pretty spookey skin and these products will affect different people's skin differently. I know people who use 'Dry' a couple of times and they're set for the week, but I also know people who use it heavily and still in conjunction with regular Antihydral treatment. It's different for everybody, but I'd suggest starting off slow and building up usage to avoid over-drying your skin and experiencing the dreaded splitting. It is better to have slightly moist hands than some bad splits that take a long time to recover from, especially when you've intentionally dried out your hands which slows down the rate of repair.

I'll start with 'Dry'. Out of the three I tested, 'Dry' was easily the most effective. At first I was a little sceptical, as for me it took a few days of continued usage before I started to notice a spooge reduction, but after approximately five nights of use I could notice the difference. However, even after five continuous days of usage it still couldn't match the dryness of Antihydral. However, unlike its German counterpart, Rhino Skin didn't leave me with that glassy build-up on my tips. After a couple of weeks of heavy usage, my skin did start to dry out and I found that once my skin was already at the dry stage, I could ease off a little on the Rhino Skin and maintain the desired level of dryness.

The trouble with 'Dry' is that, because it's a spray, your whole hand gets coated, creases and all. This is a red flag for Antihydral users,

who will know that getting drying agent in the creases of your fingers causes splits and cracking. This is exactly what happened to me after prolonged usage of the spray—so these days I take the spray nozzle out and use it as a dropper on my fingertips (the 'Dry' formula is also available with a brush applicator, rather than in a spray bottle, but only in a smaller size).

As far as I can tell, there is little to no difference between the 'Repair' cream and the hand moisturiser my Nan's used for the last 20 years. There's nothing special to it. I didn't notice any drastic changes in my hands from using this and often found it didn't soak in fast enough, leaving a greasy residue for a short time. I'll stick with Climb On for now.

I was most curious about the 'Performance' solution as it seemed to be the middle ground between 'Dry' and 'Repair', making skin tough and durable while keeping it dry. However, I think this is a bigger hoax than the Fyre Festival. I used 'Performance' religiously every night for a couple of weeks and noticed little to no difference. My skin may have been a little tougher, but it didn't feel any dryer as I slimed my way around Uprising.

**Rhino Skin Dry.** RRP US\$7 - 16

★★★

**Rhino Skin Repair.** RRP US\$9 - 42

★★

**Rhino Skin Performance.** RRP US\$9 - 42

★

—Jarrod Alexander



## BLACK CROWS NAVIS FREEBIRD TOURING SKIS

**CHIC. SLEEK. MODERN. FAD. CRAZE. OVERRATED.** These are all different terms used to describe Black Crows Skis in the last four years. The relatively new company based out of Chamonix, France, has been blowing up on the ski scene since 2006. With their strong design identity and as a brand started by freeride skiers—rather than the race pedigree of most big European ski brands—Black Crows have quickly gained a strong following amongst contemporary skiers with an adventurous approach. At first the people were divided, and maybe they still are. I, however, am a blessed convert to the Church of the Crows. With the local rep based out of the holy grail of New Zealand outdoor stores (Small Planet, Queenstown), I couldn't help but be taken with the Navis Freebird. After catching them on sale for \$999, I took a pair home.

I decided to ease into my first trip with the skis and took them for a lap up the north-west couloir of Aoraki / Mt Cook. Arriving at the top earlier than expected and not patient enough to wait for five hours for the snow to soften, we embraced the noisy hard pack and rattled our way down. Needless to say, I didn't tomahawk to my death and was pleased with the stiffness of the ski, combined with a side cut that allowed for easy and controlled jump turns.

The Navis Freebird are a happy balance of a light ski with enough weight to allow for strong and aggressive downhill performance. The underfoot width of 102 is fantastic for New Zealand conditions and can perform in the many different conditions that keep New Zealand skiing interesting. The ski turns very well in steep terrain and is stiff enough to handle hard snow or icy conditions, while progressive rocker and flared tip helps in deeper snow. The only chatter in the tips that I have experienced with these skis is upon returning to the skifield and straight-lining through a mine field of Gold Coast snowboarders and poorly formed moguls.

Lengths available are 169cm, 179cm and 185cm, with dimensions of 139/102/120 in the 185cm length I went with. The 185s (recommended for aggressive skiers), mounted with standard Dynafit ST Radicals and brakes, weighed in at just over 2kg per ski. For the other details that bear minimal relation to how a ski actually skis, such as turn radius, check out their website. For skins, I was given a pair of the Black Crows Skins manufactured by Pomoca out of Switzerland. They carry less glue than other skins and seem to lose their stick earlier than other brands, but other than that I have found them to perform well.

Overall, I am really big fan. As a ski being used for backcountry skiing, it is a worthy and versatile tool. For a more playful and slightly heavier ski, check out the Navis (the 'Freebird' version is a lighter, more touring-oriented version of the Navis) or Corvus (also available in a 'Freebird' version). The only let down is the church-joining fee. They are one of the more expensive skis on the New Zealand market, but well worth the investment, especially if (manufacturer's quote) 'you consider skiing to be an alpine circus'.

**Black Crows Navis Freebird.** RRP \$1499.95

★★★★★

—Will Rowntree



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## THE NORTH FACE NORTH DOME STRETCH WIND JACKET

**I'LL BE** honest. My first impression of the North Dome Stretch Wind Jacket wasn't great. Out of the box I thought, 'Eh, just another flimsy fashion jacket.' A nice one for sure, but probably not very useful. After a couple of months of testing, however, I was stoked to discover that I was both right and wrong. It is a very nice 'fashion' jacket (I get a lot of envious comments), but it is also very useful as well.

Described as a 'movement-ready, wind-resistant jacket for lightweight coverage at the crag', the 40D x 20D 115 g/m<sup>2</sup> WindWall fabric (88 percent nylon, 12 percent elastane) is tissue-paper thin, reminiscent of 90s chiffon, and is lightweight indeed; my women's medium weighs in at just 310g and packs down to literally fit in my pocket (only into my useful climbing pants pockets and definitely not your average women's jeans pockets).

One could be forgiven for assuming that such lightweight fabric would fail to block a gentle breeze let alone perform as a 'WindWall', but suffering through many an icy winter norwest gale at Flock Hill put it to the test and it passed with flying colours. With a rating of less than 10 CFM (cubic feet per minute) it truly is a wall against wind, an impressive feat for tissue paper.

An attached hood, designed to be 'helmet-compatible', means no gaps for wind to stealth in, and its slight peak and cinching mechanism create a good fit that ensures it doesn't get in your face or block vision.

The North Face website's 'fit-finder' (which has since disappeared for unknown reasons) asked a bunch of measurement and fit preference questions that revealed me to be on the cusp of small and medium. I went with medium, thinking a wind-breaker would be more useful when combined with a decent mid-layer. While I could've easily got away with a small, the extra room is perfect for a light, insulated jacket underneath; I can even squish it over my old faithful Wear On Earth down jacket, if desperate. The slim, tailored fit means it doesn't look like I'm kitted out in the bloke's hand-me-downs.

A good amount of stretch in the fabric and a well-designed cut makes it comfortable for climbing and doesn't restrict movement. While the sleeves are plenty long enough to keep your wrists warm, the lightness of the fabric and the 'micro-elastic binding' on the cuffs ensure that they don't fall over your hands and get in the way.

Being a controversial 'I-only-go-bouldering' type, I've never used it with a harness, but the longer length with extra at the back, 'harness-friendly pockets', and slimline zips mean it would fit comfortably under a harness without exposing delicate flesh to the elements.

One big plus of the fit for me is the generous forearm and shoulder room, often a bugbear with women's outdoor clothing. TNF seem to have got it right with a flattering slim design that is also highly functional.

Being so lightweight, I didn't hold out much hope that it would keep me dry when a norwest storm finally spilled over the mountains and horizontal rain came at us with force. However the Durable-Water-Repellent (DWR) finish was effective, allowing a hasty retreat while keeping under-layers dry. I doubt it would hold up against a Darrans downpour, but it was surprisingly waterproof, even under heavy pack straps. The attached peaked hood was invaluable, deterring nasty drips down the back of the neck.

It seemed unlikely that the ultralight fabric would be very durable. But so far it has handled rough treatment at the crag well, with no tears or pulls in the fabric appearing yet, even after being scraped over rock many times while climbing. The decent-sized zippered side pockets are great for securing phones, wallets, keys, brushes or snacks, although the chest pocket is somewhat redundant except for packing it into. It would easily fit a phone or wallet, but on a women's jacket, a chest pocket is never really going to be particularly practical.

My only gripe is that the in-pocket pull tab to pack it down broke after only a few uses and is now effectively useless. While annoying, it doesn't affect the overall performance of the jacket in any way and it's still easy to pack.

Team this jacket with an insulated mid-layer underneath and you have a very warm, very light, and very packable combo that can be taken and worn anywhere. It's ideal for chucking in any bag, crag or city, for those just-in-case scenarios, and has quickly become a core item in both my everyday wardrobe and gear stash.

**The North Face North Dome Stretch Wind Jacket. RRP \$240**

★★★★

—Erin Stewart



## MAMMUT NORDWAND PRO HS PANTS

**I SHOULD** preface this review by stating that I don't wear hardshell pants when climbing very often. I far prefer to use softshell pants when climbing, but when ski touring I opt for hardshell pants most of the time. And so I found myself shopping for a feature-rich hardshell pant for ski touring that could also be used for wet climbing days. While I initially looked for bibs, I eventually settled on a more versatile high-waisted design—the Mammut Nordwand Pro HS.

The Nordwand Pro is part of Mammut's premium 'Eiger Extreme' line of clothing and equipment. 'For athletes, by athletes', they say. While this sounds like a bunch of marketing gibberish, these pants are 'extremely' well-designed pieces of kit, everything I could possibly want in a pair of ski touring and miserable-weather mountaineering pants. The Gore-Tex Pro is breathable and waterproof. I can honestly say I can't really tell a real-life difference between any of the top shelf waterproof/breathable fabrics these days—they all seem to work really well. The 3/4 length side zips are designed to make it easy to put these pants on while already wearing boots, or for venting. Velcro-adjustable internal gaiters fit snugly over ski boots or mountaineering boots. A high back helps keep snow out without the inconvenience/bulk of a full bib. Two harness-compatible pockets on the front are big enough to easily accept an avalanche beacon (tested with Mammut's Barryvox Pulse—but big enough to fit the much larger BCA Tracker), with one completely useless back pocket. This is the only extraneous feature on these pants, and fortunately it's a minor one. Dyneema crampon patches prevent ski edges or crampons from poking through, and this Dyneema fabric is used to hem the cuffs to make them extra-durable. By far the best feature of these pants is the fit. For a long-legged alpinist, these are cut perfectly. There are multiple adjustment points in the waist and legs, as well as comfortable and removable suspenders. The legs are thin, so I can always see my boots, yet the slightly-stretchy fabric is never constricting. People passing me on the skin track tell me I 'look fast' when I'm wearing them.

The snap to close the waist is pure genius and demonstrates Mammut's attention to detail on their Eiger Extreme line. Normal snap fasteners have a nasty habit of popping open as they get old or put under tension. Not this one. Called the 'TightLock' by Mammut, this sort of sliding snap is almost impossible to come undone accidentally.

Durability-wise, I've been using these pants for over a year (around 40 days skiing and five to ten day's climbing) with nary a scratch. They've held up well when skiing through thick trees or bush bashing, but I did take a tumble once and ripped one of the zipper pulls off. The zippers themselves are small, but adequate. However, the small size of the zipper means that the metal zipper pull is very small and fragile, making a field repair—or even a home repair—difficult. The most annoying thing is that, when touring, the gaiter (and its metal snaps) often slips between the boot (currently a Salomon Mtn S/Lab, previously a Scarpa Maestrale RS) and my shin, which is super uncomfortable—so I've taken to tucking the gaiter into the top of my socks to prevent this, or rolling up the pants. Sadly, this means that if I end up postholing for some reason, there is nothing to prevent snow from going into my boots. I've yet to figure out a viable solution to this. There are two velcro tabs on the lower leg to reduce the lower leg volume. These work great, but I could see them being a problem in moist/cold environments like Ruapehu, as the velcro gets all rimed up.

At 550g (men's 34 regular), I consider these too heavy and too feature rich to be used as 'just in case' pants that I would slip over my softshells. By comparison, my super minimal Gore-Tex pants that

had 3/4 zips, no pockets, no gaiter and no suspenders weigh just over 400g and I consider that just borderline for 'just in case' pants.

Like most things in life, these are not perfect. But they're pretty damn close. At no point have I regretted not having full bibs, but I do wish the gaiter was a bit more touring-friendly. These come in a variety of colours as well as a women's version (510g)—the women's has a bonus handy drop-seat.

**Mammut Nordwand Pro HS Pants. US**

**RRP \$600**

★★★★★

—Graham Johnson



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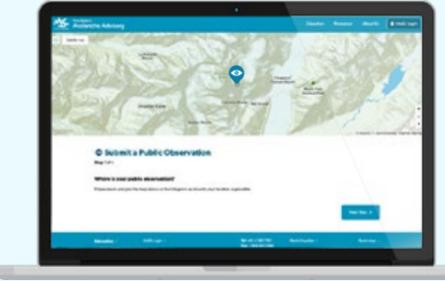
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[extremeedge.co.nz/panmure](http://extremeedge.co.nz/panmure)

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Ph: +64 (0)9 484 7290.

[aucklandleisure.co.nz](http://aucklandleisure.co.nz)

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Address: Unit 17, 101-111 Diana Drive, Wairau Valley, Auckland.

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[northernrocks.co.nz](http://northernrocks.co.nz)

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[hangdog.co.nz](http://hangdog.co.nz)

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Ph: +64 (0)3 377 3000 [ymcachch.org.nz/fitness-and-climbing/](http://ymcachch.org.nz/fitness-and-climbing/)

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Ph: +64 (0)3 389 5061

[bouldering.co.nz](http://bouldering.co.nz)

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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.

[sportsground.co.nz/waitakirc/112878](http://sportsground.co.nz/waitakirc/112878)

#### Basecamp Wanaka Climbing Centre

Admission: NZAC members \$13.50 Address: 50 Cardrona Valley

Road, Wanaka. Ph: +64 (0)3 443 1110.

[basecampadventures.co.nz](http://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.

[basecampadventures.co.nz](http://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

[recreation.ymcasouth.co.nz/com-rec/climbing-wall](http://recreation.ymcasouth.co.nz/com-rec/climbing-wall)

### Australia

#### Cliffhanger Climbing Gym Altona North 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

[cliffhanger.com.au](http://cliffhanger.com.au)

#### Pulse Climbing Adamstown NSW

\$5 discount off adult entry to NZAC members.

Admission: adults \$16, under 12 \$13, Harness hire \$5. 10/122

Garden Grove Pde, Adamstown, NSW. Ph: +61 (0)2 4023 4743

[pulseclimbing.com.au](http://pulseclimbing.com.au)

### The Last Pitch: continued from page 56

ability, or lack thereof, to differentiate between actual risk and perceived risk. This is a particularly tricky area because sometimes it might just be a simple case of nerves influencing your perceptions, while in others it is genuinely your intuition telling you something is not right.

And then there is the world we live in day to day that can encourage you to push your boundaries. I met a young Canadian climber in New Zealand two years ago who was laser focused on climbing in the mountains, leveraging all that grit and determination to get the climbs he wanted done. He unfortunately had a very severe accident on the South West Ridge of Mount Aspiring.

In the aftermath, he displayed an incredible level of honesty and maturity when reflecting on his mistakes in a post on social media. He admitted to being influenced by the 'likes' he received on social media platforms, feeling that it affirmed his belief that he was a strong and competent climber who should push harder in order to sustain his online presence.

His thoughts on it now: 'That shit is poison, dude. Almost killed me!'

It will be an experience that he will not forget and, for Allan Uren, it is exactly incidents of this nature that teach the balance between going hard and going too hard.

"The thin white line," as I refer to it, is the balance between pushing really hard and finding Nirvana. [It] is pure alchemy that can't be taught. You have to learn it, often the hard way by getting spanked ... but hopefully not too hard.'

'To make it easier to stay on the live side of the line, you need to be super honest with yourself and your abilities, which is never easy when you're young and wildly enthusiastic.'

'It requires an advanced level of maturity and being humble.'

'Humble' was a word that came up often when Allan and I spoke, and has always been a present word for me while in the hills. I always had the impression that it was a mountain that let you up it on any given day, rather than you being the one who bent it to your will—'conquering it'.

Elaborating further, Allan said that being humble also required 'that you try and grasp the gravity of death, or severe injury'.

'Understanding that we are mortal doesn't come easily to most people, and even if you're happy to talk about your own death, or have stared the Grim Reaper in the eye, there is still this feeling that somehow it won't happen to me.'

'Until you do that, you're a high risk of stepping over the line. However, having said all that, I think there is magic in young climbers being naive to all the bullshit and just letting it all hang out.'

It's a statement Allan will have lived by earlier in his career, particularly when he decided to embark on an adventurous odyssey travelling on the main divide from Mt Elie De Beaumont to Mt Cook. He and his partner Phil Penney spent 26 wild days in the hills, losing their tent at the start of the trip and travelling with no radio or PLB. It culminated in being pinned down in Plateau Hut by a raging blizzard. Growing sick of the mountains, they decided to make a bid for home.

His partner Phil believed they were so in tune with the hills that they 'somehow avoided the avalanches, like Mr Anderson avoiding the bullets of Agent Smith in *The Matrix*'.

He rounded off the story in more sobering, factual fashion: 'If you push the boundaries and try traveling in a blizzard with a metre of new snow too many times, you will die.'

After a prolific career and likely many more steps over the line than this, Allan's career leaves itself open to the question of why some get away with it, while others do not. But Allan strongly refuted that anyone can get away with it.

'That is just wishful thinking from those that think if they do everything right—train hard, stay focused, have good preparation—that somehow they will avoid accidents or getting killed. We do need to do all those things, of course, and it does help, but it is a foolish person to think they are special. Death is an ever-present shroud. Life sits on one shoulder, death on the other.'

Allan was speaking with me soon after a coincidentally-timed accident of his own in the hills, where he had a lead fall while ice and mixed climbing in the Remarkables.

So perhaps his somewhat grave, philosophical reflections had been more influenced by recent events, or even by the tramadol he was taking for the pain from broken ribs.

In any case, I found it hard to argue with his logic or philosophies.

As I explained at the start of this piece, my interest in this area arose through my time climbing with the person Allan would classify as someone who 'forgets the bullshit and lets it all hang out'.

James Warren truly encapsulated Allan's phrase throughout the season, but one climb in particular stands out when he soloed the Torres – Tasman traverse.

He explained: 'That one was a little bit frightening. When I started walking across the glacier and I was punching through the thin freeze even at 4am, I did start to think, "Am I making the right decision here?"'

'I did punch through one (snow bridge) and I fortunately just leant backwards to fall onto my pack. Sure enough, there was a three foot-wide crevasse that I had put one leg through, and that could have been it.'

A description that makes one shudder.

Somehow, despite the doubt he went through, he managed to persist and complete an awe-inspiring climb.

When quizzed on how he was able to take on so much, he explained: 'I think that it comes down to a number of things. One of them is confidence in your ability. Another thing is confidence in your ability to bail off something. That is huge.'

'Climbing on some bolted routes at Mangaturuturu, I could climb way more technically difficult routes than I would be able to find on grade 5 or grade 6 alpine routes.'

'So it is just a matter of pushing your limits in a safe environment so you know what you can do.'

'I knew my ability and I was probably too much on the risk side of things, but I was quite comfortable taking a chance and taking a risk on a few of my climbs,' he said with a giggle.

'I am pretty confident that I will do some more risky climbs in the future, and it is the nature of the beast sometimes. Play it safe and just do climbs that are well known, easy to access and not pushing your ability. Or do climbs that are pushing your ability, remote, difficult to access or just on the riskier side due to high objective hazards.'

James went on to reflect on how the season has shaped his current attitude towards risk.

'As far as this first season, it ended up being quite humbling. I certainly got out of my comfort zone and it did make me think that it might be nice to stay in my comfort zone a bit more.'

'I think in the long run it is a good thing. A bit of humility is super important. You don't want to get humbled when you are on the side of a big mountain and you are in jeopardy.'

'I don't like getting caught out and biting off more than I can chew, but when you do overcome it, that is a hell of a buzz.'

'I think that is probably "that something" that is psychologically different in some people.'

'Some people get themselves into a bad situation and get themselves out of it and have an overwhelming fear response, and say, "That was bad," while for some people it is a positive experience.'

'[Having a positive experience] is a personality trait that a number of people have that correlates with a lot of adventure sports and athletes.'

Asked how far he wants to go with climbing, James replied: 'I don't know, I just want to climb the hardest alpine routes really—but I'm in no great rush. Something that really appeals to me is doing what seems impossible.'

My quest to try to answer the question of how hard is too hard seems just that, impossible to quantify, philosophically or factually, since the boundaries are so personal.

Ultimately, it is an important question for any mountain sports person to reflect on with both an honest and humble mind. **G**



📷 Skiing the Caroline Face of Aoraki / Mt Cook.  
TOM GRANT

## THE THIN WHITE LINE

BY EVAN DAVIES

**'GO GENTLY'** were the words given to me before going into the hills by my alpine climbing mentor. 'Choose life' were the words given to a climbing partner of mine, by his.

In a sport where determination and grit are required characteristics to achieve anything, even to a meagre level, it is hard to know on which side of the line 'gentle' and 'life' exist.

My interest in this area started because I climbed with a lot of people while in New Zealand, but one person highlighted this conundrum to me more than any other through his unnerving level of self-confidence and drive.

A list of successful hard climbs in just his first season left me pondering: 'Am I pushing hard enough, and when is hard too hard?'

It is an extremely dangerous question, I think, not only for the fact that it made me consider pushing much harder, but because of the doubt it created about my own ability. It had the potential to strip me of the armour that I had fashioned, climb by climb, for the bigger battles to come, to transform me from a battle-ready soldier yearning for deployment to a teenage conscript thrown into the action.

The psychological aspect of our sport is fascinating and has come into sharp focus since Alex Honnold's incredible achievements were documented in the film *Free Solo*.

Honnold himself refers to this quandary during the opening scenes of the film: 'It is not like I am pushing and pushing and pushing until something terrible happens. I don't look at it without perspective. But maybe that is why it is dangerous for me. Maybe I am too close to it and I cannot tell I am speeding towards a cliff.'

In recent years in New Zealand, one of the people who has arguably done something closest to the line is Tom Grant, when he and his teammates made a groundbreaking ski descent of the Caroline Face of Aoraki / Mt Cook and the South Face of Malte Brun.

For most, those trips are hard to even fathom let alone attempt, but Tom felt it was within his limit. Nevertheless he admitted to me: 'I wouldn't want to ski a face like that every year.'

We both met this statement with tentative laughs.

He went on to say: 'I think sometimes you go on a trip with a big objective and everything aligns perfectly, and you can accept that there is going to be a certain amount of risk.'

'When we skied it, the amount of experience we had between us was quite a lot and I think we did it with a good margin of safety, but that is easy to say in hindsight when everything goes well.'

Tom hadn't always remained within that boundary though, saying that when he first started out skiing around Chamonix, largely solo, he didn't really know what he was doing.

'I was pretty hungry and motivated, so I would just drop into a steep line and I wasn't ever sure I could ski them safely.'

'I just kind of did it and I was just like, "Oh well, you know I had just enough skill and margins to get away with it."'

It seems like a classic Catch 22 situation. You need experience, but to get experience you have to do what you don't know enough about.

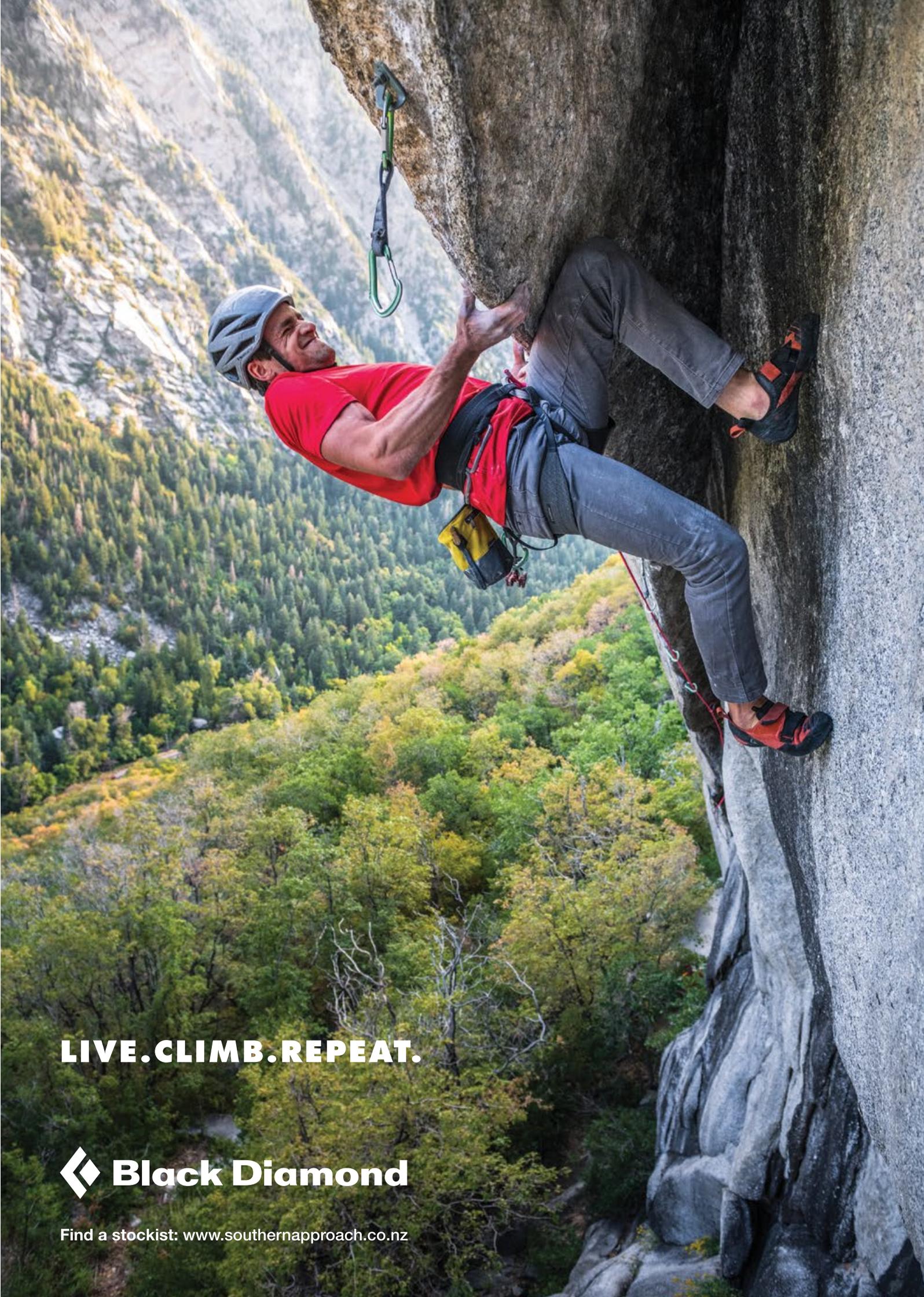
But over time it was not the knowledge and experience gained from his adventures that most affected how hard he was willing to go, but the people he knew who had died and how many accidents he had come across.

'When you are just getting into it, maybe you don't have any friends who have died, or maybe you haven't had any close calls yourself.'

'You can have that sort of naive confidence that everything is going to be alright and you can get away with it, but I think it really changes your perspective when you see all of that.'

Tom also talked about a number of factors that cause people to push beyond their limit, such as social dynamics between partners, and your

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