

December 2024

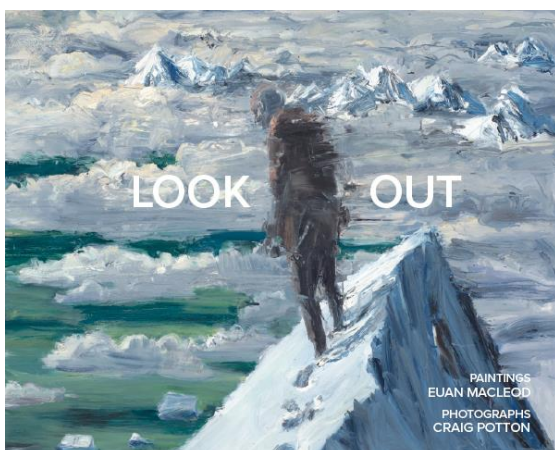
Wishing you a Mountainous Christmas!



Featured in this issue:

- Craig Potton and the November Section meeting
- First Meetings in 2025
- Gathering to thank Russell.
- Government proposes charging to use public conservation lands
- Government plan for “modernise” DOC
- Access to Mt Richmond Forest Park
- Section Leadership

Art & Photography Shaped by the Alpine Environment



At the November Section meeting, Craig Potton, NZAC life member, climber and acclaimed landscape photographer, spoke to members and friends about his collaboration with his friend from student days, expressionist painter, Euan MacLeod to produce *Look Out* a lavishly illustrated book about climbing at Tasman Saddle.

Craig explained their artistic take on New Zealand's high mountain environment and humans' place in it. He engaged the gathering in discussion about his approach to nature photography coupled with a dedication to nature conservation.

2025 is coming up fast. Lock in the dates for these Club Meetings

Wednesday 19 March.

Andy Buchanan will talk about his book, *A View to a Climb*, and climbing 100 named alpine peaks that can be seen from the Port Hills above Christchurch.

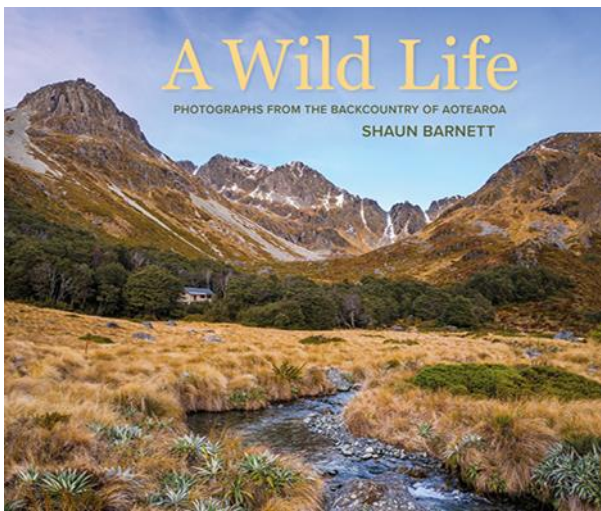
Wednesday 16 April.

Pam Henson, committed environmentalist, experienced trumper, caver and kayaker, will discuss her experiences over six seasons as an English teacher in Shimshal, a remote village in the foothills of the Karakoram Range in northern Pakistan. There is a postscript too: a long term commitment to helping local youth.

Thanking Russell Adams

A group of section member gathered at Sprig and Fern Tavern, Mapua, in mid-November to thank Russell Adams for his four years as chairman of the Nelson Marlborough Section by Russell Adams And even more as a committee member. Ross Cullen spoke of development of the section under Russell's leadership: increased membership, the range of alpine instruction, and expansion of the Sections stock of alpine equipment. Russell was presented with a copy of the newly published book *A Wild Life* which showcases the superb photography of Shaun Barnett.

Russell will continue on the Section Committee, managing the section instruction programme in 2025.



Takaka Hill Via Ferrata



Photo

Takaka Hill Via Ferrata Opens for Business

New Zealand's first Via Ferrata on Takaka Hill opened to climbers at the beginning of December. Inspired by the popularity of over 1000 routes in the European alps, the Takaka project is the brainchild of Till Middelhauve. He says volunteers from Via Ferrata Aotearoa have taken over two years to gain official consents and develop the local routes.

Completion of each route is accomplished traversing a series of steel footholds bolted to the cliff, the climber being secured by clipping onto a steel belay cable with a safety carabiner sling and climbing harness. The Society advises that climbing a Via Ferrata is generally safe if carried out with caution and respect. There is a Skill Zone which helps climbers familiarise themselves with Via Ferrata techniques. A more challenging 170 metre Cliff Traverse is available for thrill seekers. Climbers are treated to spectacular views range over Golden Bay and Kahurangi National Park. Signposts mark the access track from the carpark at the top of Takaka Hill.

A grant for the Takaka project came from NZAC's Tupiki Trust. The structures were constructed in accordance with the European standards, assessed by a chartered professional engineer and are checked regularly for safety and possible damage.

Use of all the Via Ferrata climbing routes is at the risk of the climber. Via Ferrata Aotearoa is a charitable non-profit society and has no liability for injuries. Access is free and users are totally responsible for their own safety and adhering to the rules on display boards.

Via Ferrata Aotearoa Society is registered as a charitable body and has plans to build and promote free public Via Ferrata in other parts of the country. Watch this space.

Access to Mt Richmond Forest Park

In late November, members of Nelson Marlborough's recreation community including trampers, hunters, anglers, mountain bikers and climbers together with members of the wider community joined the management of OnefortOne Forestry Limited at public meetings in Richmond and Blenheim. Rob Mitchell represented the NZAC, Nelson Marlborough Section. Graham Pomeroy represented FMC. Ange Vander Laan represented the Outdoor Access Commission - Herenga a Nuku. Tramping representatives came from the Nelson, Waimea, Motueka and Marlborough clubs. Hunters were represented by NZDA, and Fish and Game.

The OFO meetings were organised following recreation club submissions opposing international forestry management certification of OFO because of tramping and hunter concern about frequent closure of Public Access Easements from roadheads to public conservation land in the Mt Richmond Forest Park (MRFP).

At the stakeholder meetings OFO management led by Shaun Trulock described the scope of the company's operations.

80,00 ha of pine forests. 62,000 ha is in conifers and 10,00ha is native forest.

750,000 trees are harvested each year with normal harvest cycles of 20 years.

It manages 2500km of forestry roads and 125 km of Public Access Easements (PAEs) .

Though the sale of crown forests to private companies has occurred since enabling legislation in 1989, legal Public Access Easements have been provided by legislation to assure regular recreational access to public conservation lands like the Mt. Richmond Forest Park.

The Clubs emphasised the importance of assured availability of PAEs for access to the Mt Richmond Forest Park is vital for programming of club tramping up to six months in advance.

Mr Trulock told the meetings that OFO is committed to meet legal requirements of new health and safety regulations since 2015 and emphasised concern over court rulings following deaths of tourists on White Island, and deaths of employees at Pike River and the Port of Auckland. He also advised that only recreation groups with public liability insurance would be permitted on land owned by OFO.

Top of the South outdoor recreation clubs with the help of FMC and NZ Deer Stalkers Association, are seeking government confirmation that occupation health and safety regulations do not apply to non commercial use of PAE access over farm and forestry land for recreation on public conservation land.

OFO stated that PAEs for recreational access to the Mt Richmond Forest Park are generally open in daylight hours except for harvesting and when there is a fire danger.

OFO also made a commitment that most of its PAEs will be open for public use during the closedown of its harvesting between Christmas 2024 and the first week of January 2025.

An article in the November issue of FMC Backcountry 2024 describes teamwork of local tramping clubs, deer stalkers and the Outdoor Recreation Commission to improve MRFP access.

Climbers, trampers and hunters should check with the OFO and DOC websites for an up to date notification of the Mt Richmond Forest Park PAEs that are open.



Caution! Proceed with Care

Government Proposals for Changes in Conservation Management

In November the Government made two significant announcements. To “modernise Conservation management, and charge for access to some public conservation land. Neither proposal was part election campaigns mounted by any of the government parties.

If adopted, these will significantly impact the enjoyment of New Zealand’s outdoors by Club members and the general public.

Government Proposal No1. “Modernise” Management of NZ Conservation

The Government states its proposals aim to:

- generate new revenue to finance conservation work
- “Recalibrate” government financing conservation and DOC by:
- “Target” investment into “high-value conservation outcomes”
- “Streamline” planning
- “Fix” the concessions process.

Seeking to justify its action the Government has released a discussion document that focusses on:

- Responding to consistent lobbying by the commercial tourism industry to allow more flexibility in concessions for commercial use of public conservation land.
- DOC’s lack of resourcing which impacts effective performance in conservation, and national park and public conservation land management;
- Integrating Treaty of Waitangi principles in DOC policy and management.

You can read the Government’s case for introducing user charging by using this link:

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/get-involved/have-your-say/all-consultations/2024-consultations/proposals-to-modernise-the-conservation-system/>

Key questions posed by the Government include:

1. Do the Governments proposals to “modernise” Conservation management strike the right balance for you?
2. Do you agree with the proposed framework for making and updating a “National Conservation Policy Statement.” How could this be improved?
3. Do you agree with proposals to simplify management planning”? How could it be improved?
4. Do you agree with introducing classes of exempt activities, prohibited activities and permitted activities in conservation planning. How could this framework be improved?

5. Do you agree with criteria listed by the Government for public conservation land exchanges? How could these be improved?
6. Do you agree with Government proposals for disposal of public conservation land?
7. What criteria should be considered for disposal of Crown land, including granting land to Māori?
8. Do the proposals give appropriate consideration to applying principles of the Treaty of Waitangi?
9. Do you agree with the way the Government proposes to “simplify” /” improve” the processing of concession applications?
10. Do you agree to the conditions proposed for concession management including advertising applications, competitiveness of concessions terms and fees paid to the crown.
11. Do you agree with proposals to improve management of DOC concession areas eg camping grounds? How could they be improved?

Some Counter Considerations

The need for a “National Conservation Statement” is not explained by the Government. There is already long-standing conservation and national park legislation, and a Departmental General Policy document in place. What is the necessity of a new statement?

The Government Discussion document gives a heavy weighting to implementing new processes however, these mainly benefit commercial tourism on public conservation land. There is no discussion of the huge increase in the impact of commercial tourism on the funding of public conservation land management, or how the Government could ensure that realistic contribution by the tourism industry to the real management costs of tourism on public conservation land where concession holders benefit from limited competition and enjoy privileged access to areas of prime commercial appeal.

There is negligible discussion of recreational use of public conservation land which is a key statutory responsibility for DOC. Explanation is lacking on how the “modernisation” will better manage the impact of commercial tourism on public infrastructure, while protecting the enjoyment of PCL by New Zealanders

There is no discussion of the value of the internationally recognised, Recreational Opportunity Management Spectrum (ROS) management system which has guided DOC since the 1980s. This employs a balanced approach for managing human activity on public conservation land. ROS seeks to optimise shared land use by commercial tourism and informal use for individual, club or other non-commercial activity while protecting the intrinsic natural values.

Nor is there discussion of how to properly fund conservation activities utilising a blend of public and private funding and volunteer support. Significantly there is no discussion on modernisation of huts, tracks and bridge management facilities used by the recreation community and subjected to regular reduced taxpayer funding.

The discussion paper fails to explore the importance of rationalising public funding of public conservation land management currently split between multiple government agencies and DOC. For instance in 2024 through MBE, the Tourism Ministry invested considerable public funding into planning for enhancing facilities and increasing tourism to key areas such as Milford Sound (\$3m), Fox Glacier (\$3.9m), Tongariro Crossing (\$1.8m) reopening the Waikaremoana Great Walk (\$1.7m); \$6m to increase the range of short walks and day hikes on public conservation land, \$4.2m over four years for maintenance and management of huts of national importance, and funding for DOC to improve its website, and DOC’s geographic information or mapping systems. This suggests that government funding to support commercial

tourism has significant influence on DOC land activity management. “Modernisation” should ensure DOC independent in funding activities its own land areas – after appropriate negotiation over conservation-based land use with any other government agencies.

FMC’s Comment on the Proposal to “Modernise” DOC

FMC’s view focusses on governance.

It states that Conservation isn’t about profit; it’s about ensuring our land is protected in perpetuity.

The proposed “modernisation” would cement control of conservation issues almost entirely to the Minister for Conservation, which could undermine democratic processes critical to New Zealand’s conservation. FMC is also deeply concerned over the proposals to simplify the process of disposing of conservation land and to provide sole authority to sign off on conservation documents to the Minister of Conservation. Currently, this function is overseen by the New Zealand Conservation Authority (NZCA) and conservation boards.

Further, conflicts of interest could undermine democratic processes critical to New Zealand’s conservation. Recent history shows the risk of having government ministers who want to dig up or monetize conservation land. The NZCA and boards were designed as a brake on that and should not be discarded.

Proposal No 2. Charging for Access to Some Public Conservation Land

DOC manages roughly one third of New Zealand’s land mass. DOC protects iconic landscapes, nature and heritage on behalf of all New Zealanders. The Government is considering charging for access to some public conservation land and seeks to justify this with these claims.

- Legislation does not allow DOC to charge for access to public conservation land in New Zealand.
- The current charging system is complicated and unfair
- Costs for conservation management are rising
- International visitor numbers are rising. Tourist demand is placing pressure on funding of public conservation land management.
- Currently many visitors do not contribute towards public conservation land they visit.
- Overseas, access charges are “commonly used” to fund conservation work.

Key government questions posed by the Government include:

1. Do you support the government introducing charging for access to some public conservation land?
2. Do you support charging everyone?
3. Charging only international visitors
4. Access charging to special areas:
 - Facing unsustainable visitor pressure
 - Places popular with international visitors
 - Places with high biodiversity and scenic values?

You can read the Government’s case for introducing user charging by using this link:

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/getting-involved/consultations/2024/access-charging/exploring-charging-for-access-to-some-public-conservation-land-discussion-document.pdf>

Some counter considerations

For decades governments of all persuasions have failed to adequately fund the Department of Conservation to effectively manage its statutory responsibilities for conservation, pest management and recreation and commercial tourism. Reportedly DOC is provided with 0.64% of the nation's budget, yet it manages human and conservation activities on one third of the nation's land mass with a full time equivalent of 2,500 staff. Clearly there is need for reform including realistic staffing for nature, landscape and heritage conservation, commercial tourism and non-commercial visitor management. Discussion of reasonable contribution from taxation-based funding should have been provided in the Government discussion document.

Any reform of NZ conservation should justify as in the national public interest, and include utilisation of reasonable funding from national taxation revenue. It should improve DOC's ability to meet long established responsibilities set out in the Conservation Act 1987, and widely accepted by the public.

Reform should also aim to improve recreation on DOC managed land and in national parks by New Zealanders as well as conservation management. The management improvements proposed do not examine DoCs primary responsibilities for conservation management.

Imposing access fees would be radical change to the management of PCL. Freedom of access to NZ national parks for New Zealanders is a compact agreed with government by recreation groups since the formation of FMC in 1931. This right protected.

Charging for access could very well become a barrier for recreation on public conservation land by low-income New Zealanders, educational groups.

DoC has had difficulty in establishing an effective centralised fee payment system for its huts. Examination of any access charging should include discussion on the costs of implementation ongoing management, and the risks of non-compliance.

Quoted examples of access charges overseas to justify the Government case is selective. Charging is not always practical or politically acceptable. For example, in Victoria, year-round access charges are impractical because of the large number of access points to national parks and public conservation land. Charging is only viable in winter for ski resorts. Nor is there discussion of access in the European alps, particularly in Scandinavia where the right to roam is an historic practice politicians are bound to protect.

FMC's Initial Comments on Charging for Access To National Parks and Public Conservation Lands

New Zealand's public conservation land should be accessible to all. And its management and protection should be funded by the government.

"We do not support access charges or car parking fees for New Zealanders," says FMC President Megan Dimozantos. "These charges would disproportionately impact families and lower-income communities like students and younger people, making our backcountry areas inaccessible to many. The hills should not be a place for only the wealthy."

"FMC stands united in supporting conservation that benefits all New Zealanders, not just those who can afford it. While we support access fees for foreign visitors, we have been alarmed by the many recent additions to fees for Kiwis heading outdoors, such as higher hut fees, reductions in volunteer discounts, and the complex process required to access these discounts. Such barriers risk dissuading volunteers whose work significantly supports the Department of Conservation's (DOC) conservation goals."

“Most of our recreation community are volunteers on the conservation estate, and these cumulative fees will become a barrier to carrying out this important mahi. DOC relies heavily on the unpaid dedication of volunteers—our wild places deserve access, protection, and care, not attempts to profit from the very volunteers who look after it.”

“Whether we’re talking about volunteers or not, our wild lands should be accessible to all, regardless of their financial situation. New Zealanders shouldn’t have to pay for the privilege of enjoying and preserving their own backyard.”

The use of any access fees is also an area of concern. FMC is clear: any funds raised through access fees should be solely allocated to conservation initiatives, supplementing—not replacing—government funding. “The government must adequately fund DOC to protect Aotearoa’s unique environment. Conservation isn’t about profit; it’s about ensuring our land is protected in perpetuity,”

Making Your Own Submission

You are encouraged to make your own email submissions directly to DOC and the Government. The deadline for these is 5pm on 28 February 2025.

On Access Charges

accesschargingconsultation@doc.govt.nz

On “Modernising” Conservation.

landlegislation@doc.govt.nz

A NZAC Submission?

Please email your feedback especially concerns to:

Nelson Marlborough Section Committee (nmchairperson@gmail.com)

NZAC General Manager at Headquarters (<https://alpineclub.org.nz/contact>)

FMC Submission?

Executive Officer (eo@fmc.org.nz)

Join the Team!

If you would like to contribute and share the fun of shaping section activities, especially the trip programme, talk to a committee member or better still, email

Section Secretary Maree Holland: mareeholland9@gmail.com

Suggestions for Member Evenings in 2025

Section Evening Convenor, Peter Laursen welcomes tips for future Section evenings and social activities. You can meet Peter at almost any Section evening, or contact him by:

Email: occasionalclimber@gmail.com

Phone: 021 446 725.

Make the Newsletter a Gripping Read.

Newsletter Editor, Rob Mitchell is always ready to publish contributions.

- Enjoyable alpine trips
- Interesting photos of people and places
- Gear, book and video recommendations.
- Letters on issues, worries and solutions
- Welcome or Curious news with an alpine twist

Share your experiences and ideas.

Move brain into gear. Energise. Crank start computer.

Submit brilliant stories and ideas.

Email: rmitchl28@gmail.com

Phone: 027 476 4824