

OTAGO CLIMBER

New Zealand Alpine Club - Otago Section Newsletter

February 2025

March Section Night Southern Faces: Celebrating 50 Years of Climbing in Ōtepoti Dunedin

Wednesday , March 5 | 7:00pm | Otago Polytechnic



At our NZ Alpine Club Otago Section meeting on March 5 we'll be launching Southern Faces, the third-ever climbing guidebook for Ōtepoti Dunedin—arriving after a 25-year wait since the last guidebook! This beautifully designed book by Riley Smith celebrates the last five decades of local climbing and the immense growth of the scene since the previous guide, Dunedin Rock (2000).

The 250 page guide provides essential safety insights, historical context, and highlights the unique climbing culture of Dunedin. From beginner-friendly climbs to the region's most intimidating routes, Southern Faces is a must-have for local climbers.

This is a fantastic opportunity to check out some of the stunning photos and route descriptions from your favourite crags. There will also be a Q&A session with Riley, so you can learn more about the guidebook and hear about the development of this extensive project.

The guide costs \$50. For event details, visit the [Otago Section Facebook page](#). See you there!

Can't make it, but want to make sure you get a copy? [Register your details here](#).

UPCOMING CLUB TRIPS

SEBASTOPOL MULTI-PITCH CLIMBING TRIP MARCH 21 - 24

Sebastopol Bluffs is a fantastic rock climbing destination in a stunning alpine setting. It is a major crag just up the road from the Club's Unwin Lodge in Mt Cook National Park. There are many great walls with a wide range of grades starting at Grade 14 and upwards. However, as it is predominantly a multi-pitch climbing destination we are asking that all trip participants will have previous basic multi-pitch climbing experience including the ability and knowledge to abseil/rappel safely on their own as most of the multi-pitch climbs require multiple long rappels to descend.

We plan to meet at Unwin Lodge on Friday night (21st March) and leave by mid-afternoon on Monday (24th March). Staying at Unwin Lodge for 3 nights over Otago Anniversary weekend gives us two and half days to explore the range of top notch climbing in the area.

Trip organizer: Eve O'Brien
Sign up [here](#).



MT SHRIMPTON FEBRUARY 28 - MARCH 2

An ascent of Mt Shrimpton from Makarora. Saturday morning head up the Mt Shrimpton track, and make way to the tarns at around 1700m to set up camp.

Sunday morning, an attempt to the summit of Mt Shrimpton, before heading back down to the car.

Reasonable fitness is required, as we will be climbing >1400m elevation on Saturday.

An alternative route, depending on group size and wishes, is to head up from Cameron Flat along the Cameron track, then aim for the ridge and find a nice camp spot. Next day follow the ridge to Mt Shrimpton, and drop down to the Shrimpton track. This would make for 2 slightly longer and harder days.

Trip organizers: Jildou van der Werf, Shannah Rhynard-Geil
Sign up [here](#).

UPCOMING EVENTS



Join Us for the 2025 Wānaka Crag Fest!

The New Zealand Alpine Club and Wānaka Climbing Club are thrilled to bring you the 2025 Wānaka Crag Fest—a sustainable and inclusive rock-climbing festival celebrating community, skill-building, and adventure in one of New Zealand's premier climbing destinations.

Running from Friday morning to Sunday afternoon, the festival offers a dynamic mix of activities, including:

- Climbing Sessions & Clinics – Whether you're a seasoned climber with your own gear or looking to sharpen your skills, expert-led clinics and tailored sessions cater to all experience levels.
- Non-Climbing Activities – Enjoy yoga, cold dips, and other outdoor experiences.
- Social Events – Connect with fellow climbers at the Saturday night DJ party at Velo Glendhu and other gatherings.
- Conservation & Crag Maintenance – Learn about sustainability efforts and give back to the climbing community.

Crag Fest is family-friendly, welcoming youth climbers (ages 13-18) with dedicated sessions designed to ensure everyone, from beginners to advanced climbers, finds their perfect fit.

For more information and to secure your pass see [here](#).

WANDERING IN THE CENTRAL DARRANS

Riley Smith

Pop! The sound of groaning tendons echo out of the dusty Moon Board room. I love it here, but my mind races about where I can go this weekend - somewhere outside, surely! Serendipitously, the cry of my phone interrupted the haze of sweat and chalk and less than 10 minutes later, a plan was hatched to escape the city life - not just for a weekend, but 9 days exploring the Central Darrans. The plan was to 'frolic' in some steep bush, fill our yearly danger walking quota, get some high altitude swimming practice in and explore the wonderful untamed environment that is Te Rua o te Moko, Fiordland.

I could write a whole essay about the trip. But to keep it to a reasonable length I have decided to borrow (steal) and add to the wonderful words written by my companion David in the Turners Eyrie Hut book. Hopefully you enjoy some verbatim from a recent adventure in all new terrain with great company: Ben Mitchell and David Macdonald.



Quick notes about the main objective - reaching Turners Eyrie

Mark Watson describes the biv well: "Turners Eyrie is an eagle's perch of a bivouac on the North West Face of Karetai Peak. It's a precarious entry to the Eyrie whichever way you go: along an Indiana Jones rock ledge, or from above via an exposed scramble." The biv comprises of two main platforms that can apparently sleep up to 6. A full trad rack, two ropes, and a huge variety of other useful gear is kindly stashed and ready to borrow. My favourite is the custom built tarpaulin cover for the biv made by Richard Turner, complete with handwritten instructions and diagrams in the hut book of how to set it up!

CENTRAL DARRANS, 3RD-9TH FEBRUARY 2025

DAY 1

Day 1:

Bashed up forest spur to gain the Donne side of Mt Underwood. Didn't find the "cruisy fast way" up the ridge that was described to us... our route required a couple of pitches... but certainly enjoyed an open bivvi on pt 1825.

Underwood Under Wood



Ben eyeing up the crux on Underwood - we took a line up the rock just right of centre then cut out right to ridge



Rocky yet scenic sleep on pt 1825



DAY 2

Day 2:

Danced along the ridgeline ready for summit lunch on Mt Underwood. This was followed by joyful glissading across the Taoka Icefall to Turners Eyrie. A majestic bluebird day complete with epic new tan lines! Stoked to bask in the view and even more stoked to ditch our 9-day packs!

The Eyrie with Taoka icefall and Mt Patuki to the right



Amazing views will have to wait...



Make sure to sign in

DAY 3

Day 3:

Climbed 'Statue Bro' (a classic 6 pitch grade 19 on the North face of Karetai). Loved watching the sun creep across the wall... while we crept up the wall, topping out to a brilliant flaming orange sunset. Not content with the usual day variety of danger walking, we skirted the elusive Karetai 'ledges' in the dark back towards the comfort of the Eyrie. Eventually finding a contender for a second eyrie (and a dead end) we rappelled down to the scree below and munched on what some would call a late dinner at 1am.

Statue Bro Topout



Ben takes a turn on the sharp end



A new Eyrie



1am dehy - a dinner of champions

DAY 4 & 5

Day 4:

The unrelenting stellar weather meant we were due for a rest day. Ben explored the tarn shelf near the Patuki Col (some deep, some icy, all refreshing). Riley and David marvelled at the ultra-grippy Lake Turner outlet rock while drying from a swim, then popped back to the biv via an obvious col on the west ridge of Mt Te Wera. Feeling like a change of view (sorry Tūtoko and Mt Madeline), we ate dinner while gazing at the sunbeams drifting across the Donne.

Day 5:

We tested how many cups of tea can be made from the water trickle ledge and sunbathed while writing. The inreach told us some bad weather was due in a few days, so the decision was made to cut the trip down to 7 days. Moody mists and a sprinkle of rain meant we were justified in our rest. Not for long however, as we ventured on a scouting mission (this time finding a viable way across the Karetai 'ledges' that tomorrow we would have to do with our big packs).

From the Karetai - Te Wera col, we put our tat cleaning hats on and managed to collect a jumble of sun-faded cord on our way up the north ridge of Karetai. Bonus - we managed to retrieve our own tat and gear out of the cave we bailed from earlier in the week!



The crux of the 'ledge' system



Danger walking while checking out our way home

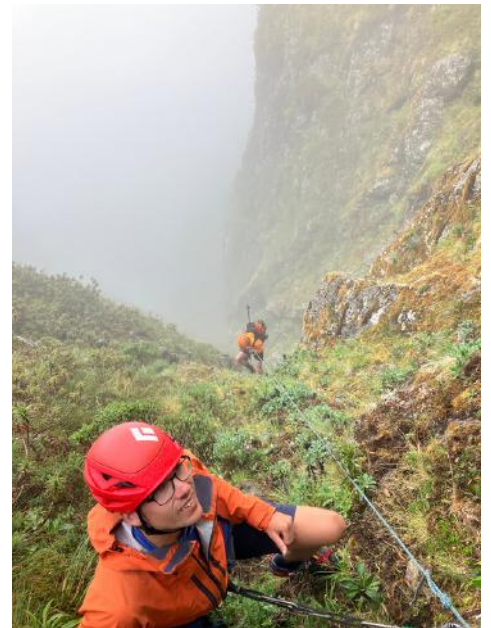
DAY 6 & 7

Day 6:

The morning was spent hugging diorite across the elusive ledges back to the col. After a couple of abseils and some downclimbing, travel became truly difficult when we reached Te Puoho glacier as mighty panoramic views borrowed our attention. Thanks to some great navigation from David, we negotiated our way off the glacier with surprising ease - calling for a "type 3" lunch (shoes and socks off, swim, jetboil out for tea!). The rest of the day was spent mind-climbing the abundant cliffs surrounding us on our way down to a lovely campsite at the outlet of Rainbow Lake.

Day 7:

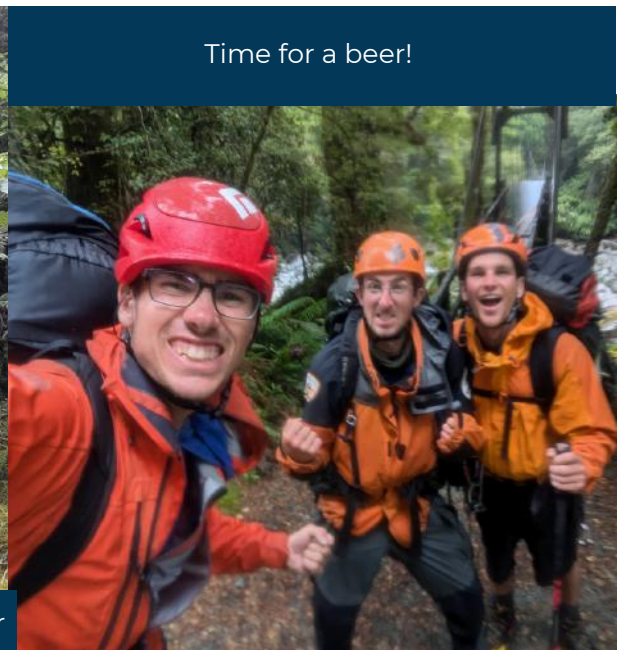
This part is easily comparable to the seriousness of multiple other cruxes we experienced on the trip, and not to be underestimated. A steep, tussock & mossy, wet (due to persistent fog) gut would be our ticket back to the Hollyford Valley. Leaning over the lip with my crampons on, I can't say I was super excited about descending into the gloom! We took one 60m half rope with us on the trip for abseils - which meant that two of us were able to complete one 60m rappel. David's loss of paper scissors rock found him abseiling 30m and scrambling the rest, while we took his pack for him. "Never again". Thinking "now the hard stuff must nearly be over" was all it took to land us in wet bush descending, followed by spicy boulder hopping - good reminder Fiordland. Eventually our persistence paid off and we were treated to our first marked track in 7 days, thank you Moraine Creek!



Abseiling into the gloomy gut



Learning that Fiordland is not over until you are back at the car



Time for a beer!

Overall, a brilliant week was had in the hills and I have already impulse-bought new trad gear for future missions. If anyone wants to know more about the route, feel free to get in touch: rileychallis@gmail.com
Thanks David and Ben!

SLOW LEARNER

Dave Brash

I stepped onto the boulder. It instantly tipped and threw me off. What happened next was all over in less than a second. I was flying through the air, upside down, and could hear a grinding, roaring sound behind me. The sound told me two things – that the rock was big, and that it was coming for me. I had to move fast as soon as I hit the ground, but couldn't spot my landing. Then I landed, hard - unable to move, wedged between two rocks, so no getting away from the monster that was hunting me. The grinding noise stopped. Momentarily unable to believe it, I hadn't been crushed.

Incredibly, I felt relatively unhurt, but I now had another issue. The rock was lodged over my lower right leg, and I was trapped. My body was wedged hard sideways, right side down, and I could move only my head and left arm. Second piece of outstanding luck – I had clipped the PLB to my left packstrap. It was in about the only position where I could reach it. Don't drop it, don't drop it. I set it off, and waited.



High on Talbot's Ladder, with the innocuous looking rock gardens of MacPherson Cirque far below.

After the initial euphoria at dodging the 'monster', and being able to set off the PLB, I realised my situation was not great. I was shaking with shock (I had a fair head knock), cold (immobile in shorts and T shirt), and having to maintain muscular contraction to prevent slipping further down the slot, which would cause intolerable leverage on the trapped leg. This couldn't continue for an extended period. I was not even 100% certain I had set off the PLB correctly, as I couldn't access my glasses. Was it just in test mode?

The next two hours were painful and difficult, and I started imagining the MacPherson Cirque waterfall was a helicopter approaching, but eventually the chopper did come, and was able to land on the riverbed, not too far away. Before long, three strong guys were able to lever the monster enough to release my foot, drag me out and long-line me out of there and back to Te Anau for a medical assessment. Thank you guys, seeing you was one of the best moments of my life. And I can tell you, lying on a beanbag outside Fat Duck with a pint of Panhead that afternoon felt pretty good too.

Last week, 20 minutes out from the Homer Tunnel, I had been heading for the Homer Saddle. To the left, the Homer Ridge commute to the stunning alpine rock routes on Moir's Mate, Mate's Little Brother, and Moir, a constant drawcard for me over the past 40 years. To the right, the exposed scramble of Talbot's Ladder, key passage to many Darrans adventures. While lying trapped, I tried to occupy myself by counting how many times I'd been through this boulder field. It came to 41, but I missed a few – I think it's 45. And another thing – I like to think I'm an expert rock hopper. Growing up on the Taranaki coast, I loved nothing more than to run hard over the smooth, slippery, moving rocks in the tidal zone. The week before, I had walked the Ball Pass circuit for the first time, and in two days on tricky terrain had not put a foot wrong, not even close. For two days, I had focused on every step. I know that the consequences of even a small mistake in these environments are high for me at 75, my agility and reaction time are low, and osteoarthritis in the knees means that if a knee is merely overflexed, I'll be lame. So how did this happen?

The familiarity heuristic, 'the tendency to believe that our behaviour is correct to the extent that we have done it before', was the first of four heuristic traps proposed by Canadian researcher McCammon in a seminal study on the causes of avalanche accidents in 2002. Not only that, but he also found that 'familiarity with a slope tended to negate the benefits of knowledge and experience'. Double whammy. I've long been aware of the operation and effects of heuristic traps - this study has been a bible for me - and still fell for it, literally. Slow learner. Well, I did one thing right – the PLB was in an accessible position.

Dave Brash

GET INVOLVED JOIN OUR COMMITTEE!

Are you passionate about the outdoors and looking for a way to contribute to our club? We are looking for new volunteers to join our committee! The commitment is minimal (just one Zoom meeting per month on a Wednesday night) and you don't need to be based in Dunedin to get involved.

Help Organise Our Snowcraft Courses

We're especially looking for someone to take over the organisation of our Snowcraft Courses, which are usually held in Central Otago at the end of winter. This year, you will have the chance to co-organise the courses alongside one of our current committee members, making it an easy way to step into the role with guidance and support.



Other Ways to Get Involved

Not keen on joining the committee but still want to contribute? We are always looking for people to help organise:

- Club trips: Plan and lead adventures for fellow members
- Tuesday social climbing nights: Help coordinate the social climbing sessions.

If you're interested, reach out via email or speak to one of our committee members at a meeting.

We can find a role that suits your interests and availability. It is up to you to decide how much time you would like to commit!

Looking forward to hearing from you!

GEAR HIRE - DUNEDIN

PLBs (Personal Locator Beacons)

The Otago Section has one PLB based in Dunedin for use by Otago Section members. Fill out the online booking form [here](#) then contact Keith Moffat to arrange to collect a unit via moffat.k172@gmail.com

Avalanche Equipment and Snowshoes

Available for rent from Hunting and Fishing, Dunedin (141 Crawford Street). Snowshoe rental is \$10 per day for members and \$15 per day for non-members.

Avalanche equipment rental is \$10 per day for members and \$20 per day for nonmembers. Members are welcome to collect the gear on Friday and return on Monday and two day's rental will apply.

If you have any issues with rental gear please contact the Section or Keith Moffat as the Hunting and Fishing team are doing us a huge favour running the rentals; please don't hassle the staff!!

Guidebooks

We have a small selection available in Dunedin for members to borrow. Contact Keith Moffat (same email as above) to arrange pick up.

The following books are available:

Aoraki Tai Poutini, Rob Frost, 4th ed., 2018

Backcountry Ski Touring in New Zealand, Shane Orchard, 1st ed., 2018

Barron Saddle- Mount Brewster, Ross Cullen, 2nd ed., 2002

Mount Aspiring Region, Allan Uren and Mark Watson, 4th ed., 2016

The Otago Southern Alps, Danilo Hegg & Geoff Spearpoint, 8th ed., 2013

Queenstown Rock, Ice & Boulders, Guillaume Charton, 3rd ed., 2018

Rock Deluxe, Ivan Vostinar and Kate Sinclair, 2nd ed., 2015

Wanaka Rock, 7th ed., 2014



GEAR HIRE - QUEENSTOWN, WANAKA

GEAR HIRE CONDITIONS

- To hire gear and organise pick up/drop off, fill in the form at <https://tiny.cc/gearhire>. You MUST email Chris (Wanaka) or Bryce (Queenstown) to let them know you have requested gear. They will respond with payment and pick-up arrangements
- Minimum is 2 days
- When hiring the avalanche set (transceiver, shovel, probe), please supply your own 1xAA alkaline non-rechargeable battery.
- Gear is hired with the expectation that it will be returned clean and tidy. If gear is lost or damaged, replacement cost will be charged.
- Gear can be reserved in advance by paying in full via bank transfer
- All gear must be paid for on booking.

if you have issues with gear or the rental, message conzac@gmail.com.

NON-MEMBER GEAR HIRE CONDITIONS

NZAC members may hire on behalf of non-members joining the same trip knowing that the NZAC member is responsible for any loss or damage. The non-member pays the non-member prices.

PLEASE NOTE:

The NZAC is not responsible for providing any technical advice regarding the fitting or use of gear hired. This is solely the renter's responsibility.

GEAR AVAILABLE

Avalanche set:
transceiver, shovel, probe
Walking ice axes
crampons
helmets

Member price:
\$10/day - Avalanche set
\$5/day - any other item

Non-members renting via a member

\$20/day - Avalanche set
\$10/day - any other item

Payable prior to pick-up
No refunds

Current NZAC Membership card
required at pick-up
\$100 bond required in cash

Gear pick up & drop off

Queenstown contact:
Email Bryce @
bawood13@gmail.com

Wanaka contact
Email Chris @
chris.hogan@gjgardner.co.nz



Otago Section Committee

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<https://www.instagram.com/otago.climber/>
Trip info & booking: www.osonzac.org.nz

Get Involved

Committee member
meeting second
Wednesday each month.
We are always looking for
more volunteers to share
the load of section
leadership. Please get in
touch if you'd like to come
along to a committee
meeting (currently via
zoom).

To find out more, contact us
at
otago.climber@gmail.com

NZAC DISCOUNTS

NZAC members get up to
50% off selected shops &
activities

Click [here](#) for more
details