

North Otago Section Newsletter



Photo: Aoraki from Two Thumbs Range

SECTION NEWS

Next Quarterly Meeting –
19th March at SAR rooms,
Oamaru, 7:30pm onwards.
Hugh will show some slides
of his alpine flowers trip to
Arctic Sweden followed by a
few slides from other
members' adventures.

WAITAKI CLIMBING WALL

**Club nights at the
climbing wall** are
Tuesday 8:00 -9:30pm and
Thursday 5:00-6:30pm.

CLIMBING GUIDES

**New Southern Faces –
Dunedin** – the new guide
to climbing around Otepoti
Dunedin. Now available
through the Alpine Club
online shop.

WHO'S BEEN WHERE, DOING WHAT

Arctic Alpines of Abisko, Sweden, Hugh Wood

Blue skies and a warm 20°C greeted my evening arrival in Kiruna, Swedish Lapland. Hopefully, the ideal weather conditions would prevail for the next week as I explored Abisko National Park situated nearly 300km inside the Arctic Circle. Sadly No. Next morning grey skies and passing showers graced the scene and would persist in the days to come, spoiling the view of Lake Tornetrask and the surrounding mountains.

From my accommodation in Bjorkliden village at an altitude of 900m, a network of nature trails afforded access to the higher tree-less tundra. In this quiet environment the local wildlife, that included Reindeer, Moose, Lynx and Lemmings together with a variety of bird life, may be spotted at a distance. By the wayside enlarged patches of "Twin-flower" and "Dwarfborne!" provided ground cover amass with scented flowers. My focus was on higher windswept ridges. There grew many choice flowers such as procumbent Cassiope Diapensia, Net-leaved willow and Wild Azalea to name a few. On a rocky knoll perched a long-tailed Skua eyeing proceedings.



Abisko Alps

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Njulla Mountain at 1,360 metres high dominates the nearby landscape. A chairlift operated by the Swedish Tourist Association gets one easily to 900 metres with expansive views all round. Climbing higher to lingering snow patches revealed a range of new alpines. Dominant above the snow, on drier rocky ground, was the “Glacier Buttercup: with large white to deep pink flowers. Equally showy was the “Purple saxifrage” and “Yellow Violet”. Higher towards the summit grew a colourful “Lousewort” and a dwarf “Fleabane”. To the west, high mountains on the Norwegian borders were spectacular. Reindeer living here in the nivale zone were soon to wean their calves. So to minimise disturbance, the mountain was closed to visitors in the weeks to come.



Saxifraga oppositifolia on mt. Njulla

The day visit to Trollsjon, a glaciated valley, perhaps held the promise of varied floral displays. The six kilometre walk into a small lake was undertaken in cold drizzly conditions. At the valley entrance a tumble of large rocks was testament to a glacier long since gone. On lower slopes a mosaic of mauve and yellow highlighted the flowers of Wood Cranesbill and Globe Flower. Higher up the valley, large rock formations held miniature alpine gardens with pink Moss Campion, white Mountain Avens and red Dwarf Willow the most prominent flowers on show. But the most common flower seen was the Alpine Bartsia with deep purple blooms. Being hemo-parasitic it instantly wilts and turns black when severed so devoid of water and nutrients. On a sunny day the terminal lake is a vivid blue colour, but now shrouded in low cloud, shaded grey.

On hearing of a secret location for Sweden’s rarest orchid had my spirits uplifted. The One Leaved Butterfly Orchid only grows above the Arctic Circle and it had been located in a ravine on the south side of Njulla Mountain. Getting there required grunt, losing sweat and enduring bee stings. However, it was found in flower growing in a rock recess. The tiny yellowish green flowers are pollinated by mosquitoes.

On the last full day in Abisko the rain clouds departed and blue skies returned. With haste I returned to the nature trails above Bjorkliden. On lower grassy slopes the Alpine Gentians opened its flowers of brilliant blue while by higher snow patches the Alpine Mouse Ear and Alpine Speedwell were at their glorious best. Next morning en route to Kiruna airport a lone reindeer was on the road out for an early run. In danger of being run over it escaped injury and disappeared into the birch scrub. A fitting climax to an Arctic experience in the land of the midnight sun.

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Nick Shearer's Summer 2025

My summer climbing started with an ascent of the Guideless Buttress Route on Mt Wakefield in Aoraki Mt Cook National Park. David and I had an early start after a comfortable night at Unwin Lodge. We followed the Hooker Lake track almost to the viewing area on the east side of the lake. A vague track marked for the Ball pass heads off into the scrub and we then followed the scree slide directly upwards to the buttress. The easier start takes the steep creek bed to the right of the main buttress, and climbs up until you can traverse left onto the crest main buttress at about 1200m. There is no path and the way is not completely obvious on the sloping ledges, but we just took the line of least resistance and it worked out well.

Once on the crest of the buttress the climbing is delightful on mostly solid pink greywacke, with bands of looser rock, thankfully on the easier sections. We never felt the need to get the rope out of the pack, or put rock shoes on, but sometimes the exposure was exhilarating.

At about 1800m the ridge finally eases off and you can walk over to the descent route on the south ridge of Wakefield. We left our packs here and scrambled up steep loose scree to the summit for lunch. The descent is long and mainly down the south ridge, sidling the odd highpoint on the way. At about 1400m, there is a well-defined track descending to the carpark beside the road and Hooker Bridge. This is a fun day out and involves just moderate climbing, hard scrambling, and a little creative route-finding.



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The next summer adventure was actually a winter one. I joined Peter Platts and John Taylor on a skiing road trip around British Columbia for two weeks. We resort-skied at Sun Peaks, Big White, Red Mountain and Apex. To break it up we ski toured at Crystal Mountain near Kelowna, and at Strawberry Pass near Rossland. The tours were reasonably short and easy but with nice ski runs to finish especially off Mt Kirkup. We thought the trip up Kirkup would be a wilderness experience, only to reach the top and find it was a commercial cat-skiing destination! Canada was cold; -25degrees C when we arrived and it was hard to keep feet, hands and face warm.



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Mt Toby, Two Thumbs Range – Ian Davison

In early December, I had an overnight trip into the Two Thumbs Range. Walking in and out from the Tekapo side was a bit of slog. However, the ridge tops around Mt Toby were much more interesting, although rather frost shattered. The small lake just under the summit of Mt Toby is an idyllic camping spot with many smaller ponds as well as the larger lake. An annoying wind sprung up just as I was about to pitch camp so I moved further on over the ridge to a more sheltered spot. With otherwise perfect weather, I had good views of the Aoraki and the other mountains in that area as well as the mountains in the Two Thumbs Range.



The view from Mt Toby towards the Thumbs



Looking down to the small lake with Lake Tekapo in the background

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Harwoods Hole, Takaka – a pictorial trip by Jim Anderson, Photos by Robert Kirkby

There's a 45 minute walk to Harwoods Hole from the carpark. To traverse Harwoods hole you abseil in, then walk out through cave for 3-4hrs. The whole day was just shy of 10hrs car to car.



First you set up the top anchor on this boulder.



View from top anchor. It is around 180m from here to the bottom!



Rigging the lower anchor.



After the first (slippery) 30m the abseil is free hanging straight down the hole, then you walk out through the cave over 2-3hrs. Cave was huge to start.

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Once in the stream tunnel, a fair bit of time is spent hugging the walls past deep pools.



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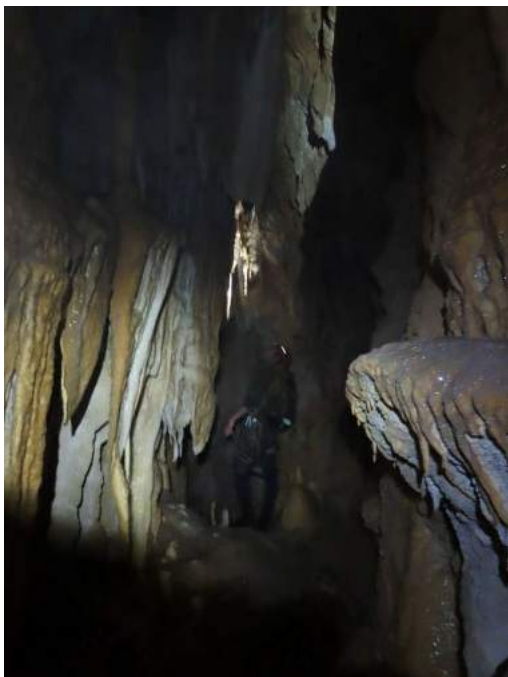


Second half of the cave is more a caving cave, some small spaces. You need to get on your back and wiggle through this squeeze feet first.

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Starlight passage, a very fragile and sparkling, dry section near the end.



Light at the end of the cave

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Doctor's Point

On a very sunny day in February, 5 of us (Ian, John H, Hugh, Jim and Kim) plus Argo the dog paid a trip to Doctors Point for a spot of beach climbing. Not that we did a great deal as the black rock soon warmed up and we retired relatively quickly to the ARC brewery.



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CLUB EQUIPMENT

Equipment available to hire by section members: 2 avalanche transceivers, 2 PLBs, ice axes, shovel, avalanche probes, 1 bouldering mat.

Conditions of Hire

1. Only members can hire gear. They can hire gear for others in their party who are non-members.
2. Free hire for members; non-members in the party pay a hire fee.
3. The hirer is responsible for the return of the gear.
4. If not returned the hirer is responsible for the cost of the replacement item.
5. All details must be filled out in the hire book.
6. If hiring PLBs please text details of the trip to either John 021 203 4914. Ian 021 144 9409, or Dara 0274 370 860. This is essential for prompt Search and Rescue initiation.

Hire fees per day:

Ice axe \$5

Shovel/probe/ avalanche transceiver \$10

PLB \$5

Boulder mat \$5

Please pay either cash to John, Ian or Dara or pay directly into the club bank account:

03 0937 0199696 01

Please use your phone to take a photo of the bank details so you will remember to return the gear and pay if necessary. Tick the items off in the hire book when returned.