

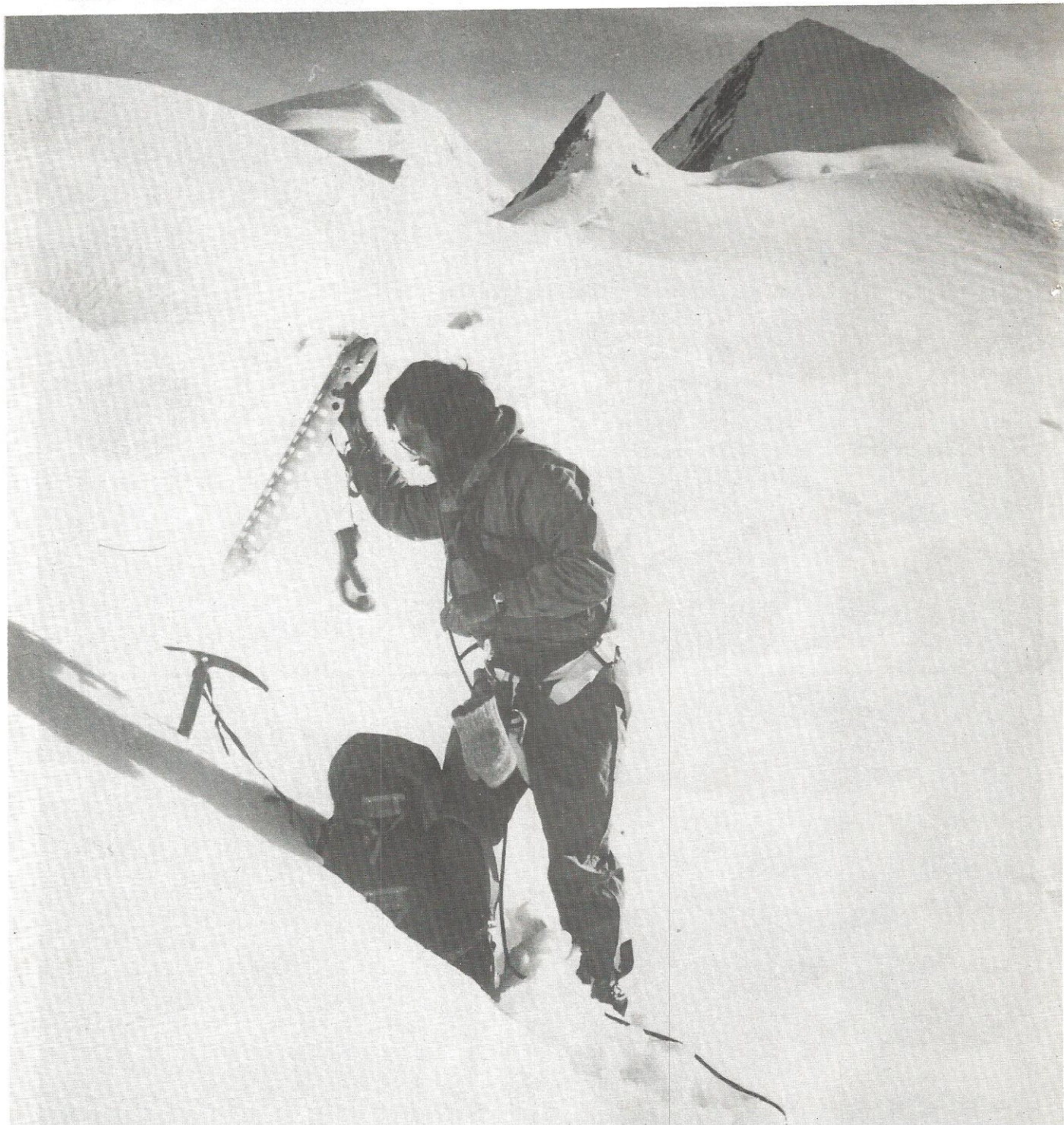
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MOUNTAINEER

december

REGISTERED AT THE G.P.O. FOR TRANSMISSION BY POST AS A PERIODICAL CATEGORY "B".

BUSHGEAR PL



**SUPPLIERS OF BUSHWALKING,
ROCKCLIMBING, CAVING, SKI-
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THE MOUNTAINEER

DECEMBER 1979

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COMMENT

As this is the last Mountaineer of the decade it features a selection of comment, humour and articles from Club magazines of the last ten years.

The Journal of M.U.M.C.

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SOME EXCERPTS FROM EDITORIALS

"It is not until such a move is forced upon you that you begin to realise the value of what you already have. The barbeque in November, for example, was held in a 'secluded garden setting'; had it been held at the Meteorological Workshop we would have been sitting on an asphalt drive-way. Then again Aikman's Road, with a little help from climber's hammers, boasts a number of fine climbing routes: these have occupied many a lunchtime. Any attempts at trying to climb the Meteorological Workshop and it will probably fall down!

December 1977.

"Mountaineering can be a tough and dangerous activity, and this is a good thing. That view from the mountain top may be breathtaking (Snap it, Hiram!), the trees and animals encountered very nice, and the fresh air good to breathe, but it is for a sense of excitement and danger that people go into the wilderness. When one is made to feel a little frightened, then one begins to feel more alive. In mountaineering we postulate the possibility of death, so that, in the (possibly superficial) struggle for life, we appreciate living more. In mountaineering, things have to be hard and dangerous to be satisfying. Put in a black way, every real mountain needs a death"

September 1975.

"I am sick of having to fight for acceptance as a serious mountaineer just because I am a woman. Women are viewed by society as husband-hunting fragile objects incapable of doing anything strenuous. However, more and more women are discovering how strong they are and enjoying activities formerly reserved for men. Women, too, respond to the challenge of mountaineering".

May 1976.

"The Editors personally feel that the Club may well be disbanded and its assets realised to set up a fund for a Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise on Mt. Feathertop!

P.S. The next editorial is to be a review on the relevance of "Deep Throat" and "Inside Linda Lovelace" to mountaineering."

June/July 1974.

SOME EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS.

".... As far as canoeing goes "husband hunting fragile objects" are not "treated badly" by being "flattered or praised" insincerely.

Anyone who has been front paddler with Ross in a Canadian to the tune of "draw left, you idiot, not right" or "stop screaming, you chicken! It's only an eight foot waterfall with rocks at the bottom" would hardly complain about excess flattery.

As far as tenting arrangements go, our miss mountaineer implies that one benefits from these. Anyone who has had the pleasure of sleeping with the beautiful Tricia S or Kate R, and the sweet sound of a badly tuned ten ton diesel truck engine that is their snoring will not be in a hurry to agree..."

July 1976.

"The food section of the store is maintained in order to provide cheaper, more sensibly packaged mountaineering food for mountaineering trips - not a snack bar pandering to the whims of a self congratulatory leisure class. Serving a core of club members as familiar with stores operations as any assistant, who have nothing better to do with their time than clock in stores assistants and grow fat on cherry strength bars, is not a priority...."

October 1977.

"We are writing this letter anticipating the usual arguments by the stores officers that they are not here to serve people. Dear stores officers, what a load of tripe. This is exactly your function. Due to your lack of activity in the past one member of this household actually discovered a centipede amongst the strength bars! You may not think you're here to serve but please don't let the store do all the work by itself.

October 1977.

"I of the Morals Committee deplore the activity of certain Committee members. For example, a certain couple of the Committee, holding responsible positions, went away for a weekend by themselves, rather than go on the President's day walk.

Another Committee member, in fact the Club President, was heard to ask if any sleeping bags with full length compatible zips were available for the beginner's trip....It is left to the imagination as to what he wanted it for!"

May 1974.

"Evidently, rivers exist to be dammed, diverted and destroyed for the production of unnecessary electricity, storage of unwanted water; forests exist for the manufacture of pulp for the wasteful packaging industry; and mountains for the provision of ski resorts catering for the well to do. Environmental issues pale into insignificance

when the question of capital arises. We are running a poor second. The basic Capitalist philosophy is to make increasing profits. These are made by increasing production, through greater exploitation of natural resources! Natural resources will only be permanently preserved by a society that holds beauty and aesthetics to be of greater importance than profit. Clearly a capitalist economy is not the framework in which this can be achieved"

September 1975.

But the letter that outdid them all was not even sent to the Mountaineer.

"Getting Bushed is No Sport"

Sir,

I would like to have my opinion printed about the so called "sport" of bushwalking.

Recently my second son came home and asked to join a Bushwalking Club. He'd evidently been sucked in by a salesman at a Bushwalking shop who had an axe to grind. My lad is only 15 and is a good student and footballer, and I have no intention of letting him go out and get lost like so many other people you read about in the papers.

The community organises plenty of sporting activities to keep young people busy and it's only student "long hairs" and "eco nuts" that go out in the bush getting lost and lighting fires that burn off our valuable timber.

If they like the bush that much they can still be useful to society and volunteer to help out on our hard pressed dairy farms on week-ends. The farmers at least put the bush to good use.

"Mother of 4 boys"
Morwell.

Reprinted from Latrobe
Valley Express.

SOME CHARACTERS

"Ask any bushwalker and he will tell you that all climbers are mad. It is well known, however, that this year's new recruits are past being mad and already famous for their Kamakazi climbing styles and tremendous falls, much to the horror of more experienced and 'staid' climbers.

Either being keen or silly, most beginners have fallen. 'Yo Yo' Rothfield being most notable for his attitude of preferring falling to climbing. He was recently heard expressing disappointment when reaching the top of a climb without mishap. The longest fall so far has been 35 feet by Neil Blundy upon Resignation at Arapiles"

June 1975.

"Picture the Club climbing hero at Arapiles on a bright, sunny holiday morning; he is fully racked up with his krabs, slings and crackers. His helmet is perched across his black curls in a jaunty fashion and he is whistling 'Eskimo Nel' softly, to the accompaniment of clanking Chouinard hexes. The all coloured 'beau brummel' boots and his blood red climbing rope show him to be one of those few men capable of scaling the mighty chasms of tip toe ridge. Look around and you will see other young heroes each singularly equipped to do deeds of great daring. Note the studied casualness with which they collect their gear; envy the confident relaxed manner with which they approach their set objective.20 chattering, goggle-eyed, very impressed school girls who have come to Arapiles for instruction"

August 1974.

"Then, four days in Three Johns. A raging blizzard outside. We talked and explored each other's personalities. Mark, a powerful and strong person. Andrew, quiet and reserved. Mark, boisterous and seemingly confident, yet always turning to Andrew for the crucial lead. Andrew was the buffer, Mark the voice. They lent on each other and work as a team.....

.. "Power up it!". How many times did I hear that expression. It will always stand in my mind as the symbol of Spain and Kelso. Sefton bivvy. The three of us under the rock, others in the hut. The choofer would not work. Two feet of flame from the safety valve. Mark becoming more furious by the minute. Andrew calmly solves the situation. In our bags we talked. The clubs, people, climbs....

March 1976.

"and a well known climbing fanatic has been known to announce to many a pub night his priorities in life - mountains, food...and women. Many an outrageous North Wall climb has eventuated due to a sublimated sex drive. Our hero has been known to really hammer his crackers in. Alas...cold, lonely winter bivouacs have had their effect. A recent trip left in a fanfare of publicity, avowing more deeds of North Wall daring-do. The trip, so to speak, became tent bound on the plateau. The romance of a shivering figure depositing sleeping bags down steep icy walls to test the warmth of his wet wool socks in sub-zero temperatures has given way to spring pastimes"

September 1976.

"I fling him" said Tony.

The Deddick was flowing fast and the capsizes were coming just as fast with Jacqui, Mark, Ross and Sue, and Tony coming to grief. Then Dianne capsised in a long rapid and appeared at the bottom with a big gash under her left eye, but still holding her boat like all good canoeists should.

"Your eye is O.K.", says the resident optometrist, "but your cheek will need a couple of stitches".

"More like five or six", declared Jol, realising that one of the activities of a good first aider is reassurance.

"I fling him" said Tony.

"Oh no", said Barry.

Other members of the trip, also knowledgable in first aid, kept their heads down or eyes averted to maintain cerebral circulation".

February 1977.

Windy Old Weather

1. Up jumped Nick White with a gleam in his eye
He cried, "winter's coming, I'd better get high!"

Chorus In this windy old weather, stormy old weather,
When the wind blows, we'll all go together.

2. Up jumped Annabelle Roth - she's cuddly and warm
And she'll make up for any old port in a storm!

3. Up jumped Tony Kerr. Oh, what a pity,
He sat down and wrote ten letters to the committee.

4. Up jumped John Bennett all covered with hair,
He cried, "snow is falling, but I can't see where!"

5. Up jumped Bob Chappell with his hand on the line,
He cried "fishing's started and I'm feeling fine!"

6. Up jumped Marg James and went into a spin
"My bikini's worn out and my jeans are worn thin!"
7. Up jumped Geoff Fagan -- he seemed rather full,
He sat on his tail and shot off some bull!"
8. Up came Sue Eager and Rosemary Sear
They looked around and ask "Any men here?"
9. Up jumped Bob Cannon and Blood on his hands
He looked at his feet and said "that's where she stands!"
10. Up jumped Ian Thomas with a mighty big smile
On a clear night his teeth can be seen for a mile!
11. Up jumped Clive Parker with a piton and crab,
"Climb Vampire Crack feet first - hell, I'll have a stab!"
12. Up jumped Max Corry with 'is foot in his mouth,
He said "Melbourne's too warm, I'm heading south!"
13. Up jumped Les Southwell with a pack full of gear,
With all of that junk, how did he get here?"

Anon.

March, 1976

"It was as cold as an ice berg gloomy and glum
It was as cold as the hairs on a dead bear's bum"

Ancient saying

At the beginning it was calm. The moon was full, so we switched off our torches. It was a good freeze and the cramponing was easy. The rhythm of our movements was soothing and we could relax. In the middle of the night we walked across the Grand Plateau to the East Ridge. We began to work up a sweat over those three miles. Indigestion came from the midnight porridge. The ground steepened and we, panting now, entered into the hardness of the climb.

At some moment during every climb you consider retreat. Usually this moment is when that first surge of energy fades, and before second wind. You wonder at being tired so soon. That mountain seems to be so big. You have doubts...yet at the same time you move up. Beneath the huge bulk of the East face of Cook we wondered about what we were doing. Each bump we climbed only led to another. The way up to the ridge looked steep. We moved clumsily over crevasses. Buggered! ... and it seemed a good time for some chocolate.

If you do not turn around with your doubts, you become mentally committed towards success. So we moved on, and into argument. There were various ways up to the ridge but we disagreed over which one to take. In the dark, George led out into difficulty. Two other climbers moved quickly above us, up an easy gully to our right. Cursing, as only one can at three in the morning when forestalled, we belayed across steep ground to the gully. The moon had set, so using head torches, we moved up, over a bulge and onto the ridge.

Once there we had intended to rest, but it was too windy and cold. In the sheltered gully we had been sweating but now we put on parkas. Slowly we moved together, upwards. It was cold but the sky was clear. Away down to the south the first signs of bad weather were approaching. Before today it had been poor weather for a week. If we're to climb it had to be now.

It became steep, and we belayed. We used snowstakes, and led out full rope lengths. The climbing was not very hard but it was exposed. Climbing was nicer than belaying. Leading out we could forget the cold, the wind, and our numb feet. Whilst on stances belaying we each cursed, the other for his slowness. Towards the top, the ridge became steep as it merged with the upper Caroline Face. There were four difficult pitches and our calf muscles ached as we front pointed up. We could see light between the two front crampon points as they barely penetrated the ice. In the fusion of cold and climbing we became absorbed. I can remember George pissing on his numb fingers to thaw them, and my newly acquired technique of belaying with my hands in my crotch. A mighty pitch led by George, and we neared the top.

It was seven o'clock in the morning when we gained Cook's summit ridge. We climbed over the crest into a gale. It was obvious that a traverse over the mile of summit ridge to the high peak was not feasible. The other two climbed down towards the Hooker glacier. George and I hesitated, and turned towards the top. It was easy ground to the middle peak and for a short time our hopes rose. But the ridge was too

"LIKE A DEAD BEAR'S BUM" (Continued)

exposed, too long, and the wind too bitter. It cut through our parkas, chilling us and the tips of our noses became cold. If the ice had been easy we might have made it, but no one could belay for a mile in the wind. We turned around, and followed the others. There were patches of green ice to cross and everything seemed too cold, bleak and high.

On the way down I slipped but self arrested easily. More than carefully we reversed front pointed to join the other two climbers. They were at a stance cut out of ice, near a frozen rock. Below, the gully snaked steeply down over green ice, rock bulges, and verglas. We abseiled twice, using both ropes, and the frozen rocks for anchors. On the way up we had climbed as separate teams with hardly a word exchanged. Now, we teamed together. Swapping names and jokes, it all suddenly seemed easier with four.

We were soon sheltered from the wind by Cook's west ridge and the going became easy. The southern slopes of the Hooker face are gentle, and we cramponed down quickly. It was sunny and on a convenient rock ledge we removed our parkas. It was a marvellous contrast to the bleak summit ridge 2,000 feet above. Another gentle gully would lead us down to Empress Hut and a brew. It was only ten o'clock and we decided to walk on to the Village that day.....

It was the seven o'clock radio schedule that evening, and 'ZIVA' headquarters were discussing a problem with Plateau Hut. It seemed that four climbers were missing on the East ridge of Mount Cook. There was no sign of them, the wind on the top was vicious, and the weather was closing in. People were worried. Gardiner Hut knew nothing, and Empress could not be contacted. As people pondered, the radio crackled "This is four Hooker four Hooker! The four climbers passed through an hour ago. Heading for the pub! Over!"

Summary - An ascent of the East ridge of Mount Cook to the middle Peak in poor conditions.

Nick Reeves,
George Kuczera.

December, 1976

Somehow I seem to recall standing at this spot ten minutes ago. "Okay, John, see if you can find the way!" Within twenty minutes John had sniffed out a route through an incredible maze of slots and triumphantly produced his guide dog certificate as evidence of his competence. I grunted disapprovingly, I failed guide dog school. After two hours of ever walking upwards, we reached the delightful Envers Hut below which the Mer de Glace plunges majestically into an icefall. Directly above us the towering red granite walls of the Grepon disappeared into a sea of swirling black clouds, accompanied with occasional thunder claps. However, this forbidding sight seemed trivial compared to the condition of our groaning stomachs. So, after feasting on our assorted scraps that alarmed a few French "gourmet" climbers, we checked the weather - it will be a fine morning was the verdict.

It was! Skate! Skate! sang our blunt crampons as we gingerly ascended glazed ice to the foot of the face. Dawn was at hand. Blank walls gradually shed their shrouds of secrecy, revealing blank walls. The guide book read "climb to foot of snow couloir and traverse left onto slab..." We stared at the snowless couloir. Chamonix had experienced a "dismal" winter which was responsible for the frightening states of many of the routes. A short delicate pitch on rounded notes led to the slab. Several fine slab pitches allowed us to climb onto the sun bathed walls that had been luring our stiff cold bodies. A trying pitch slowed us down. And in the midst of this a French climber soloed by! "Good day, Pierre!". Several moments later the serenity of the morning was disturbed by a stream of obscene curses. "Pierre" had slipped whilst doing a hand traverse, and had fortunately caught one of our runners to check his fall. He tried the traverse again, and we watched with high expectations. I was happily humming "Gory, Gory, what a hell of a way to die!" - what an excuse to pike. He made it on the second try. On witnessing this spectacle, two English "guns" below us started to absail down complaining of acute pulmonary oedema. I tried to cough up some blood but failed. "Hey, Johnny, do you want to pike?" Taking note of his almost murderous gaze I accelerated upwards.

Several pitches later, we reached a col formed by an isolated granite spire and the Grepon face. After consulting the bible, I decided that the indistinct middle buttress was to be tackled next. Johnny disagreed, maintaining that it was the right buttress. After several attempts to justify my conclusion he demanded to see my guide certificate. I gave in, sensing approaching defeat. So we proceeded up the right hand buttress. Our route meandered continually as blank walls forced numerous traverses. To my delight we finally climbed onto the middle buttress and recognised the turret from which we had to make a diagonal left abseil to gain the left buttress that would lead to the summit.

That dour old bastard Huey decided to entertain us with the third movement of the "Pastoral Symphony". An icy wind accompanied with a gradual dimming of the lights opened the movement. After several easy pitches, the buttress steepened and, after a false lead, a superb system of cracks and flakes offered some fine sustained climbing. Finally, the buttress merged with the vertical summit wall broken by a series of shallow grooves cum chimneys interconnected by horizontal ledges. Unaccustomed to the exertion I was tiring at a humble 12,000 feet. The last few pitches were hard, tiring, and slow, and made

unpleasant by the harrassment of swirling snow flakes.

Pleased with the climb we reached the summit ridge. A ridge is about the worst place one can choose to unwind when a thunder storm is closing in. Our ice axes began to hum. Within a minute we were abseiling crazily down and traversing a snow plastered face until once again we were on the ridge. Another abseil and an excruciating "cheval" section led us to easier ground. The force of the wind increased, now stung our faces and froze our gloveless hands. My axe hummed threateningly. What an alien world! Suddenly the murky sky came alive as sizzling lightning bolts struck the summit and ridge above us. No time for finesse! I ran across the snow covered rock face onto the Nant Blanc glacier with its relative safety. Johnny, being more rational, was grimly feeling his way with crampons. He said he was gripped. I confessed to being terrified.

Bivouac time! We stamped out a snow platform and made ourselves "comfortable". Whilst the choofer was noisily melting snow, and we were happily discussing the epic that was, Huey introduced the Pastoral's fourth movement. The thunder clouds dispersed and the wind assumed zephyr like intensity. Below us the lights of Chamonix competed with a sparkling frosty heavenly firmament above us. This is the real thing, I thought. However, this elation gradually gave way to distasteful contemplation of the next few interminable hours. "Here sit two idiots in wet clothes, no bivvy gear under a clear sky at the head of the glacier". What a load of shit gets flung about the romance of bivvies... That night we froze.

Summary -- The climb was the Mer de Glace Face of the Grepon, late August, with George was Jonathan Levy, SAAC.

SLOT:

Anus McRaves

September, 1976

The plane circled lazily in the brilliant sun. All around were large craggy mountains, soaring skywards. The pilot dipped the plane towards the saddle and prepared to land on the glacier. It was a performance he had repeated many times before. Rich, brash Americans, quiet, unassuming Japanese, young eager Australians - he had seen them all on his plane. It was all the same to him. He enjoyed the flying, flirted disinterestedly with the women, desired some of the girls, and ignored the rest. Another Southern Alps scenic trip. He glanced at the dials and began to land.

The girl was a pretty, young student, on holiday from Melbourne. Pert nose, taut lips, and gently curving breasts. The type who carried a large nylon pack and used her long golden hair to hitch lifts from hostel to hostel. There was no problem getting rides. Nor meeting people. What was the name of that nice, tall, dark Engineering student from Melbourne who had met at Wanaka? A climber, who might well be here, at Mount Cook. George Kuzzles or something.

She gazed up at the towering precipices and inwardly shuddered. And there was the orange hut where climbers slept. How small it had looked from above. She was dizzy and a bit sick from the flight. She barely heard what the pilot was saying as he let her pass. Out on the snow it was all bright, and she wished for some sunglasses. Minutes passed and the other passengers prepared to enter the plane.

The American matron gave a piercing scream, and the pilot whirled around, shouting, warning. Between the plane and the girl, what had been only a small crack had widened to a large chasm. The icy crevasse surged towards the girl, grinning horribly. Below the bulging sides were glinting wickedly in the sun, row upon row of sharp icy teeth. With a strangled cry the girl dropped down as the snow below her opened up. The pilot could only listen helplessly to the chomping. The mangled body plunged into the depths. With a loud snap, the icy jaws shut. The snow heaved, and there sounded a satisfied belch. A pair of bloody sneakers were spat up, and the small six inch gap smiled contentedly. The SLOT had struck!.....

Next week: Retired, handsome, English Army officer, Dredge Moron, otherwise known as "Colonel Slothunter" is called in by a scared collection of Hotel owners, park rangers, travel operators and alpine guides. Read about the spine chilling duel between man and SLOT.

FRENCHMAN'S CAP

A climbing trip report
by Tim Hancock.

July, 1972

The huge white cliffs of Frenchman's Cap are seen rearing up to the south of the Lyell Highway on the way to Queenstown soon after you leave Derwent Bridge. The Cap offers Australia's finest rock-climbing, and in the last 8 years, has seen climbing parties heading south, mainly from Victoria, to tackle its unique quartzite.

A trip to Frenchman's is usually a massive undertaking for a climber. It necessitates the preparation of air drops months before hand, and then a twenty mile walk in from the Lyell Highway with packs usually well in excess of 80lbs. - usually constituted of about 20lb. of personal gear, and 40lb. or more climbing equipment. As climbers are notoriously lazy -- unless you can drive to the foot of a cliff it is not worth climbing on -- the Frenchman's trip is looked at with mounting horror and apprehension as the time arrives for the trip to depart.

This year, no less than four parties undertook the death-march from the Lyell Highway over Mt. Mullers, across the sodden Loddell Plains, to Lake Vera, over Barron Pass to the Lake Tahune hut, and some great climbs were repeated. The prize of the season went to Chris Dewhurst's V.C.C. party who took the first ascent of the 1250 east face over 1½ days. Also on the scene were another large V.C.C. party, a Tasmanian party, and the mighty 1972 two man Interstate Frenchman's Expedition, consisting of the MUMC honorable climbing convenor, and his counterpart from the University of N.S.W. My mate Mike Swain, and I have been on some pretty funny trips but this one took the cake. Arranged on about a week's notice, preparation done the night before leaving, no air-drops, it looked like the craziest ever trip to go south to the Cap. "They're mad!" several expedition-worn V.C.C. members are reported to have said.

Mike dropped what he was doing and arrived on 23rd February. While I sat an exam afternoon, he went out and bought some food. We packed that night in about two hours, and by 11.00am. the next morning we were on the road from Devonport. That evening we were eating black-berries and ice-cream by the river at New Norfolk. Two o'clock in the afternoon of the next day (Friday 25th), and the long haul began in blisteringly hot and humid weather. First there was the cage across the Franklin River, and then everything merged into a haze of sweat, with occasional glimpses of the great rocky peaks apparently retreating as fast as we advanced -- Lake Tahune was a very welcome sight at three o'clock in the afternoon the next day.

Sunday morning, and we were off up to the North Col to sample the rock. After a long easy route we were much impressed sound, solid, compact quartzite, blinding in its whiteness. But we still had not tasted the real quality of Frenchmans, for we were on the N.W. side of the great dome, and it is its 1500 feet S.E. and east faces which offer the finest, most serious climbing. Imagine Arapiles piled on top of itself five times; imagine a grade 15 or 16 climb at Arapiles extended over 1500', the beauty of the line not one whit diminished, and you will have some idea of the magnitude and quality of the greatest climbs at Frenchmans.

In 1965, a Sydney party spent an epic three days fixing a route up the greatest line on the S.E. face. The magnificent "A Toi la Gloire" resulted. 1500' of south route", it has become known to a generation

FRENCHMAN'S CAP (Continued)

of climbers as the "Sydney Route". It was on this route that we set our sights on our second day at the Cap. After toiling up the scree slopes we were roped and climbing by nine o'clock in the morning.

The first few pitches were easy scrambling, but soon the climbing appeared in earnest. Mike led a long pitch up to a pillar at base of the line proper with only one runner, and then it was my turn. Up an overhanging chimney and then a rotten overhanging wall to a perch on a tiny ledge. It was a very hairy pitch, and the next one for Mike was no better. The chimney continued, and then another wall, made unreluctantly difficult by the small sloping holds of the quartzite.

Above Mike's belay the line continued as a steep clean crack in a corner. It was climbed by jamming my hands in the crack and bridging with my legs against both walls. Looking down, there was nothing to be seen except the ropes disappearing into the cliff to Mike on his little ridge, and the ground, now 500' below. The verticality was unrelenting.

This pitch was meant to be 100' long, but when I had run out one hundred feet of rope, and was standing on an impossible wall tied to a very bad peg, and a cracker, it was obvious I had overshot the belay. The route traversed left from that point, so we had to find it before continuing. From my one foot stance I could now see where we should have gone, so Mike came up, belayed me down from the cracker, and then continued left and upward. The next pitch was meant to be the crux — traverse across a blank wall to a nose from which there was nothing but space to scree 1000' below. We sat and meditated over a block of chocolate, then I knew I had to try it. First up to a rusty peg, and then out across the blackness with the exposure mounting with every move. The holds kept appearing, regularly and solid. A stop for a photograph, then the hard move where Peter McKeand had eliminated the peg for aid on the second ascent 2 years before, and I was standing on the ledge, seemingly supported by nothing. It was a sensational position. Then onward across another wall, and we were in the exit chimnies. Another 40 minutes, saw us on the top in the evening sunlight. It was the greatest climb we had done together; there was no doubt.

Two more days, and we had explored the Cap, and seen enough to want to come back again for a much longer time. We packed our packs, lighter now because we had eaten the food we had hauled in with so much agony. We were out to the Lyell Highway by 9.45 in the evening of Wednesday 1st of March, after 8½ hours of walking, the last miles being covered in the gloom of the fading light, and pain in the shoulders, legs and back. By 6.30 on Thursday we were home. Eight days to the Cap, and back.

Janice Weate
September, 1976

Only a week and a half before we began our journey Geoff and I decided on a 20 day walk of the last 200 miles to the very top of Australia. Information on Cape York is not common in Melbourne; bushwalkers have only a vague idea of heat, wet, tall grass, isolation and insects. No one seems to consider it a place for bushwalking, especially in February, the end of the wet. As a result, and also because of the terrible standard of maps available, we left seriously wondering for the first time in our lives if we would ever see home again! But with this went an unusual feeling of trepidation and excitement.

At Cairns the whole walk was replanned because our train had been stopped by floods, and we had subsequently missed the plane to Iron Range, our initial starting point. After almost two weeks of changing plans we managed to get a lift by prawn trawler to a place half way between Iron Range and Bamaga, at an aluminium shed called 'Captain Billy Landing!' In the process of getting a lift we talked with fishermen from practically every boat in Cairns harbour! A movie camera would have been fantastic to record their reactions to our plans. The norm was to look in disbelief for a moment, then slowly shake their heads and say "well, I wouldn't do it!" We gathered that our original plan to cross the Pascoe and Olive Rivers and then bush bash was a little far fetched in the time we wanted to do it in. A better plan was to walk along the beaches, and then find the track running East/West to the North/South road to Bamaga. Apart from this, it became necessary to only walk half the distance because of the time spent getting a lift - we would only just make it back to Uni. The local opinion of Cape York was that it was really wild country, and that crocodiles, previously shot out, would be increasing now, due to protection. People were concerned that we did not have a gun. At Cairns we also changed a lot of equipment. We now had a tent of groundsheet type material, that would not be as heavy as a japara one, and army airbeds to give us height above soggy ground.

Finally embarking on our now 100 mile walk was really good- all the waiting and planning was over. The boat trip really showed us how isolated it is there. It seems strange to we Victorians to think of so vast an area of sand dunes and rocky headlands completely devoid of people and resorts. Cape Melville was a headland which was really striking. Its rolling hills were entirely covered by large boulders, and they even jutted out of the sea. It was exciting getting close to Captain Billy, but at the same time a bit depressing to see points in the distance that we would have to walk around. We were dropped off in the late afternoon and had time for a quick look around before evening. Both of us were incredibly jumpy, we started at any quick movement or unusual noise. The night brought with it anxiety and loneliness - it is funny how much you miss people when they are not around. The noise of city life felt positively attractive.

Next morning was fine and hot when we finally started at about 9.30. We had good and bad surprises. The good ones were that you would really have to try hard to starve along this coast. The sea and even small tide pools are teeming with fish, especially sharks. At one river mouth we saw about ten 3-5 foot long sharks in a foot of water. There is also a coconut palm every 60 or so metres - good if

you can climb them! Worries we had about the reliability of water ceased when we saw the small waterfalls on cliffs at most of the rocky headlands. Our bad surprises came at about 10 a.m. when we came across a creek which was not on either of our maps. We started to wade across but turned back when the water was waist high, and still deepening. Removing ourselves to a respectable distance (because of the possibility of crocs) we waited almost until low tide. Geoff checked its progress at about 12 noon and came bounding back with news that it was only 8 inches deep now! Continuing with merry hearts, we came across Captain Billy Creek and were surprised that it was little bigger than the first one. Walking until nearly nightfall, we camped at Hunter Point. We were both pretty tired -- sand isn't usually as firm as you want it to be. We noticed a cycle in one's daily outlook -- optimistic and hopeful mornings gave way to pessimistic afternoons, then a more patient acceptance of the situation at night. This happened until we found the track to the main road. Lighthouse and ship lights were pleasant to see.

Sleeping soundly, and too long, we moved at 11 a.m. But it wasn't entirely unplanned because we were close to a big creek to be crossed at low tide. When we came to it we still had to wait a couple of hours. One's morning ambitions get a little frustrated, but at least it is a nice long lunch break. This creek was knee height at low tide, and about 16 metres across. Today's goal, 'False Oxford Ness' looked an eternity away and certainly felt like it. The beach leading up to it was extremely straight and, therefore, gave the impression of incredibly slow progress! Something that surprised us about the beaches was the amount of washed up debris. There were lots of rotting thongs, bottles, glass covered balls covered in knotted netting (floats), coconuts, and continuous pumice along high water marks. Often rain forest tended to be on the south side of points, with mostly coastal she-oaks and acacias right by the beach everywhere else. There were very few eucalypts. We finally reached "False Oxford Ness" at sunset and camped in the next small bay in the dark.

At 4 am, we actually arose as planned to start walking early and cross a large creek at the early morning low tide. It took us one and a half hours to eat and pack up before we left hurriedly. (We never really saw the camp site!) After stumbling along the dark rocky beach at first, we finally arrived at the creek at about 8 am. It was a pleasant surprise to find it easy to cross. At high tide there would have been an enormous lagoon. From there we strolled to 'Oxford Ness', because the largest creek we had to cross (judging by the map) was coming after, as well as extensive mangroves with sand flats in front at low tide. After an enormous meal and a snooze we set off at about 12.30. At first we had to cut behind the mangroves, with their heavy roots looping out of grey fibrous mud. After an hour or so, after coming out onto the sand flats we encountered a truly enormous estuary. After a timid peer at its approximately 40 metre expanse we waited for an hour for a lower tide. When we began to wade across, the bottom disappeared from view behind the very dark brown tannin stained water. We nearly turned back at this point, but continued cautiously until the other bank was reached. Looking back we were surprised to see a small shark cruising around where we had just crossed. 'Logan Jack', the worst one, was still to come, and overshadowed our victory.

After half an hour, a similar creek was reached but it was a little smaller. After another 45 minutes, we felt fairly sure it must have been Logan Jack. In 15 minutes we came across the real Logan Jack, significantly bigger than the others, its waters were just short of waist deep and about 60 metres wide. Reaching its opposite bank at last

was not so much a celebration but pure relief! Now only the state of the track could turn us back. The remaining hours were spent getting close to Left Hill, which was where our search for the track would begin tomorrow. It was a long but exciting day as we had now covered almost half the distance to Bamaga, but we still had serious doubts about our prospects. The track was marked on our 15 year old army map as an "old track position", but a fisherman had also mentioned a track like it.

In the morning we set off on a compass leaving for Left Hill. It is about two miles inland. After about half an hour of toil in the steep rain forest country we climbed a tree and stupidly chose a hill from the surrounding ones as "Left Hill". It was stupid because the hills were very similar and we saw some large sand dunes ahead. These were marked on the map and the track passed close to them. After a short while we came to a small lake and deduced we were just north of Left Hill. After more bush bashing through either thick rain forest or thicker tea-tree, without having arrived at any prominent hill we finally set off for the sand dunes. The country here is so misleading that one wonders if the compass is alright, it is also difficult to follow the bearing properly. Anyway, of all things, we come across a disused track. After lunch we followed it happily towards the dunes, but then it curved around and went almost north. After several miles the track had deteriorated to a band of young 10 foot high acacias, so we back-tracked and did a final bush bash to the sand dunes. Acacias had a habit of being home to numbers of rather large and biting tree ants. By now it was evening and we were in the most miserable mood yet! It poured all night and we discovered that the new equipment dripped water along the seams.

The rain eased in the morning and after going an entire circle to begin with, we reached another row of dunes. An enormous lake was visible which was certainly to be the one on the map. Walking on another bearing we finally arrived at the North end at about midday. Skirting around it, and then heading North we came across a veritable four lane highway. Only short grass grew between two definite wheel tracks. After a few miles of travelling in an excellent direction (West sounds best, East is a beast!) we came to an even better track. Bamaga felt really close now. We even found a soft drink can - such civilization! Rain at lunchtime and most of the afternoon, cleared in the evening. The walking was now quite boring, because there were no views or steep hills...

We finally reached Bamaga. It's an aboriginal reserve about 15 miles from the very northernmost piece of mainland. Its size astounded us - the few buildings marked on the map had grown to a town of 1500 people. We did not mind having to leave the next morning without visiting the very tip, Bamaga had become our goal. We only just got back to Melbourne in time after flying over the most northern point in a low flying 'island' plane to Thursday Island airport. It was a pity we did not see more of Bamaga. We got thoroughly stared at when we arrived as we were strangers arriving at a time when no one travels overland.

Back in Melbourne it was strange because it was so familiar and freezing cold. We'd been away a full month and spent just a week walking. It certainly was worth it for the experience, not so much for the scenery.

Janice Weate. Geoff Lawford.

Some impressions of a club ski touring trip in July, 1977

The Mountain View Picnic Shelter between Mt. Beauty and Bogong accommodates cross-country skiers most Friday nights in the snow season. After a five hour drive from Melbourne there is not much to do around a dark cold shelter where no camping is allowed, except to get into a sleeping bag under a table and get some sleep before an early start. In the light of the morning it is a surprise to find so many people packed in under the tables, and on the tables as well. There is intense activity as stoves start chuffing with breakfast, gear is packed, and ice is removed from car windscreens.

At Falls Creek there is chaos as people park cars and then look for the other members of their group. Vehicle tracks and the previous day's iced up ski tracks present the immediate problem of when to stop walking and put on skis. Is the snow going to be this icy out there?

Yes it is. That side slip out-of-control feeling alternates with small drifts of powder snow that slow down the skis with a jerk. Somewhere along Heathy Spur, at a steep upgrade, the ice is smooth and about 2cm. thick. Sliding down it in a tangle of skis, stocks and pack is no fun: hard to stop and even harder to get back up again. Some of us take skis off and walk up, kicking steps with our heels: the only way to break through the ice. Somebody calls down from the top that it's easier with your skis on. No comment from us. Thoughts like - maybe metal edges would make all the difference, or it must be easier with skins, come to mind as we plod on in a bad mood. We reach the top, where there is snow again. The weather has taken the opportunity to snow and the wind has sprung up. Visibility has dropped; there won't be much of a view.

We all have tents, but it is very windy. Maybe there will be room in Edmonson's Hut. Follow the leader, zig-zag down a steep gully. Can't see very much. Is it the mist or just the goggles fogging? The leader goes straight up the other side of the gully. We take a less steep route and through the snow gums at the top is the hut. There is 20cm. of powder snow on the ground and more going by horizontally in the wind. A good time to go inside and have lunch.

The wind and snow keep on through the afternoon and evening. We ski around the hut in the shelter of the trees. Out in the open the snow is blown away and the ground has many icy patches. Others arrive at the hut. Some camp, their tunnel tents seem to take the wind quite well. Others arrive. There is room for us too, they say. Plenty of room in the ceiling. Everybody likes a cheery fire to stand around and dry out by. Everybody tries to stand around it and cook dinner at once. The people camped outside come in to cook dinner. It is only fair.

Six of us cram on to a shelf meant to sleep four. It is the top bunk, Pity the people on the edge. Rolled up tents make terrible pillows. Our boots are stiff with cold the next morning, even kept under our pillows inside the hut. The wind and snow are as strong today as they were yesterday.

Others ski off to Mt. Neise and Johnston's Hut for an excursion. Later we try too, but turn back as we don't know the area well enough. Visibility is so poor it is hard to judge whether you are skiing across a slope or down it. The wind blows away your tracks and the isolation is complete. Better save our energy for skiing back to Falls Creek.

It's 6.30 pm. on the Monday of the June weekend and the phone rings:

"Does Dave Caddy still live there?"

"Yes".

"This is Harry Schaap..."

Having heard the news of a man lost in the Lerderderg Gorge, I know why Harry is calling -- he doesn't ring me often. He can't tell me much about the search, except that the Police only want us for one day (to add to the work done by Police, locals and volunteers on Sunday and today) and that nothing significant has been found yet apart from a dented thermos.

As I haven't been on a search for years, I have forgotten to tell my new boss that I am even in Search and Rescue, so have to find his home number and ring him there to make sure I can go -- yes. I spend the rest of the evening sorting gear and packing two packs for tomorrow -- a day pack with essential items I will carry searching, and a large pack with most of the rest of my gear in it -- it may come in handy! (For two days in March one year I searched on the Baw Baw Plateau in hail and sleet, soaked with ice-water, and didn't even have a change of clothes, or my wool trousers, because I had packed as I would have for a March bushwalk -- never again!)

Tuesday morning -- 5 am.

Out of bed and it's quiet, cold, grey and rainy. A hot shower and breakfast improve things a bit, then follows a surprisingly busy drive to Dawson St., Brunswick (I didn't know so many people drove around at 6 am!) In the yard there full of cars, landrovers and the bus which will carry us, bushwalkers arrive in ones and twos to shelter from the drizzle under the verandah. Police check in and out and ignore us -- life goes on, searches or not. Inspector Bill Brand (Police S & R) and Eric Quinlan (F.V.W.C. S & R Polic Liaison Officer) arrive about the same time, discuss details, then we all stand around and wait -- as Theo later remarked:

"Why don't we do something?"

From someone else:

"This your first search?..."

Finally at 7.15 we leave, with sirens being tested in the garage to farewell us.

The bus trip is uneventful -- a briefing by Max Corry on how Bill Howell was lost (carrying refreshments alone to long-distance walkers coming down the gorge on Saturday afternoon, when the river rose at one metre per hour), and the areas searched up to now. Mike Tegg (sharing the Field Organiser job with Max) puts us in groups of four or five -- I am with Craig Devlin, Theo Dreher (MUMC), Graham Mascas (MBW) and John Mulligan (WCV). After all these formalities people doze, speculate on what could have happened, swap trip stories (or search stories -- "Were

you at the search for ...?") or get information from those who were there yesterday. In Bacchus Marsh, four more walkers from Geelong get in - we're now just about sitting on each other's knees, which makes my donning of boots and final shuffling of gear between packs a bit of a juggling act.

It's still drizzling as we leave the bus at 9 am. for a muddy 4 km. walk along a track to our starting point. One sweep down the west bank of the gorge and back up takes from 10 to 12 - we have to continually shift our line of five across the slope as other groups converge on us from both sides. Minor "border disputes" and fine-detail navigation provide some distraction for our minds as our bodies half walk, half slide down the steep loose and very wet hillside.

Back up on top we have lunch on the track as the cloud lifts and the rain stops. Max passes on his way to speak to groups further north- we are to return 3 km. along the track and search an area not covered the previous day. We search this valley by contouring around it from a steep walking track down a spur - much of the time the adjacent searchers are more above and below than beside me in the line. Craig finds a quick way down one scree gully (which doesn't do his shorts any good!) and the rest of us wait while he climbs back to where we have grouped. We are entertained by trying to work out what the large numbers of S.E.S. searchers on the opposite bank are doing by listening to their calls. A last sweep down a very scrubby ridge finishes our search for the day - 3 pm.

As we are still 3-4 km. upriver from search H.Q. at Darley Ford, we have to walk down. On previous days the river and banks had been exhaustively searched and probed, so there is little we can do except check anything unusual or interesting - very little, as it turns out!

At Darley Ford there are several vehicles and caravans (Police, S.E.S.), the Salvo's mobile kitchen trailer, and many of Bill Howell's relatives. His wife, her parents, his sister and her husband and others of his family and friends are sitting around a fire, as they have done for three days now, waiting to hear anything. In talking to his sister for a while I find out that although he was not an experienced bush-walker, he knew the area very well, as he had taken horse-riding parties on the tracks around and above the gorge. No-one says much about his chances of being found alive - after three days of intensive searching only the thermos has been found, and that was on Sunday!

By 6 pm. the other searchers have been driven back, fed and had time to change, so we leave for Melbourne. People doze again or talk, but it's quieter than on the way up - tiredness and probably disappointment at not having found anything. By 7.15 we are in Dawson St. again. It and Melbourne are busy, and it's just another wet winter night for nearly all of Victoria - except the Howells.

P.S. A few weeks later, Bill Howell's body was found in a pool in the river, just upstream from the point where he entered the Gorge, and where Search H.Q. was located.

Membership of S & R is open to anyone who:

1. is a current member of M.U.M.C.

"WHAT'S A SEARCH LIKE...?" (Continued)

2. is reasonably fit,
3. owns their own equipment,
4. can take up to three days off from studies or work on short notice (usually overnight; call-ups can be refused if inconvenient),
5. is recommended by the Club Committee - there are guidelines laid down by the F.V.W.C. S & R Committee setting minimum standards (these amount to having bushwalking experience in all weather and terrain, the ability to navigate - who wants searchers who become lost?! - and the ability to camp out while searching for up to three days).

Do you qualify?

THE LAST GREAT CANOEING SHOW ON THE MITTA-MITTA

This year's state of hyperactive MUMC canoeing lead to the tackling of the Mitta-Mitta River in midwinter. We had canoed most other accessible rivers in Victoria in the previous six months, but had never been on the Mitta.

On Friday, 4th July, six hardened canoeists left for Nine Mile Creek below Hinnomunjie Station on the Mitta-Mitta River. One of the cars came up over Mt. Willa after arranging the car shuffle. They got a taste of what was to come; a little snow and ice on the road.

Saturday morning and we were on the Mitta with the water absolutely freezing. A few rapids later, with fingers numb with cold, we began to doubt the sanity of the trip. A Mitta fire was lit for lunch, and we warmed up. Enthused by Cammo's description of what should be done to the person(s) responsible for introducing blackberries to Victoria (blushes from Karen) we paddled on. The rapids were fairly easy, the water a little shallow but the temperature was taking its toll. A near capsized (by the author) was avoided by a strategic push off the bottom. Yes, that water was certainly cold; falling in would not be fun.

After passing a couple of overhanging limestone cliffs the river standard improved with a couple of dramatic drops into neck deep stoppers just above the Gibbo River junction where we set up camp.

The night was bitterly cold; a little rain fell but not enough to cause distress. Half an hour after getting up it hit us. Snowflakes the size of five-cent pieces streamed out of the grey mist above. The ground was completely covered. It was too late to pike; we didn't have enough time to take the rest day we all wanted, and so we packed as fast as we could whilst thawing our bodies by the fire.

Off we paddled down the river; over a drop and through the stopper to be met by an icy blast of snow in our faces. This was a unique experience; real Eskimo style, but exhibition rolls definitely out.

"Canoeing is fun, we are not cold", declared Timmy.

We came to the first of three grade 4-5 rapids. We portaged. A hundred yards further on was the second. Again we portaged. The rapids we did shoot certainly weren't easy; long and difficult with multiple drops and stoppers; probably grade 3-4. Then came the third of the major rapids; another portage by all except myself. By a stroke of luck I came through upright.

Cammo was the first to go, felled by a Trotskyist plot between the current and the rock. Cammo desperately tried the Capitalist roll but to no avail. Next to go were Timmy Hughes (twice) and Bill Cruickshank. The water was bone chilling; one spill and you'd had it. With half the party soaked to the skin and the other half shivering in their boats, camp was made high on a sandbank. Another Mitta fire was lit and we

thawed out,

The snow and sleet stopped for the night but Cammo still had his excitement. Hearing a growling sound he awoke with a start. "Karen was snoring", thought Pete, but a closer examination revealed that she wasn't. The noises were now moving away from his tent. In true cow-cocky style: "It must be a wombat after our food". Cammo leapt out of his tent, armed with his torch and years of experience on the farm, he was ready for battle. But the wombat could not be found. There was only the snoring author in the other tent.

Next day we started earlier as it was not as cold as before. Once in our boats that changed. A cold wind cut right through us as we paddled down the river, winding our way down the mist laden valley lined with snow draped ridges.

We paddled on, determined to make this our last day on the river. We had many miles to cover, the Dartmouth Dam to portage as well as some rather tricky rapids to negotiate in the meantime. We reached Dartmouth just as darkness was falling, and hitched a ride with our kayaks on a 4WD utility, avoiding the portage. The ride was somewhat airy, high speed on roads smothered in mud. We shortly arrived at our car and drove into Mitta-Mitta for a welcome night in the pub.

CANOEING FREAKS: Tim Hughes
Jol Shelton
Steve Lottkowitz
Bill Cruickshank
Pete Cameron
Karen Roberts

BARWON SIALOM -- The worst slalom I've ever been to (My story)

We'd all paddled the Barwon before -- a piece of cake. I was full of confidence as we drove down to Geelong one Saturday morning. All Victorian rivers were high and the sun was shining. However, after viewing Buckley's Falls -- a real tourised waterfall, I then scrambled over the rocks to view the Big Stopper. The gates were being erected down the sides of the river. Rumours were circulating that David Danks, a top paddler had vanished into the stopper, capsized and broken his boat. "I'm not letting my daughter into that" one anxious father confided in me (later I found him urging his little girl on with the full vigour of a parent at a Junior League Football Final and speculated on whether it was a scare tactic or not).

Soon everyone was having practise runs. I sat at the top in my fairly new Alternativ Boat. Paddler after paddler went down -- all confident. Yet still I waited. Eventually, a top ex-British paddler told me to follow him down.

"You'll be right" he said.

"What happens if I fall out at gate 2?" (Right above the big water) said I.

"I wouldn't if I were you" said he,

"You'll be in big trouble."

Off he went. I followed -- gate 1 clear. Gate 2I was side on to a rockFrothy water over my head. I don't remember getting out of my boat and I even forgot to hang on to it and my paddle. I suddenly feared for my safety. I swam with all my might and was battered into rocks and cut on sharp edges.

Fortunately I swam sufficiently to miss the big water and was dragged ashore by conscious onlookers. My paddle, recovered by Bill was bent at a 90° angle -- I was lucky it was not laminated wood, but only aluminium. My boat was split. I gave up for the day!

That night I could hardly walk. Two other battered swimmers from Southern Cross Canoe Club and I, all of us black and blue, wandered from caravan park to caravan park to find a van. Bill and Craig Price following thought we looked like war refugees.

Not yet entirely defeated I'd sent home for a Prijon Olympia, a bulbous boat I had previously got down just about everything upright in. I'll be right, thought I.

It was soon my run. I paddled off. I was through the stopper, into the eddy and ready for a break-out. Too far, I was in. Once again I scrambled out and swam. It was easy this time and I was not hurt, but I had had it. I retired to judging.

The day was interesting. A famous person's super kevlar (many times stronger than fibreglass) boat, split on a protruding bolt. Craig Price's boat broke, and Bill paddled a one man team of 3.

A Great Weekend.

VIGIL AT LAKE PEDDER

April, 1972

A very important aspect of the continuing campaign for preservation being waged by Lake Pedder Action Committees in Melbourne, Sydney and Tasmania is the maintenance of a vigil at Lake Pedder itself.

This is regarded as a symbolic action - it signifies that people are prepared to brave the rigors of the climate of South-west Tasmania to keep watch over the threatened lake.

So far only a moderate amount of publicity has attended the vigil, but it is anticipated that this will increase as time passes. It seems that flooding of Lake Pedder from water backing up behind the Serpentine Dam will not affect the Lake until about mid Spring (October) - close to the time of the Federal elections.

The vigil was established early in March and it is planned to sustain it through the coming months IF enough "vigilants" can be found.

A comfortable, sheltered campsite has been established on the southern side of Maria Creek, equipped with tents, a wide range of camping gear and food and fuel supplies - the last being replenished regularly.

We are appealing to members of walking clubs in Melbourne as those best equipped to maintain the vigil to volunteer for a contribution to the vigil. Please canvass as many bushwalkers as possible for their active support in this specialised phase of the fight to save Pedder.

To ensure coordination of the manning of the vigil, please ask interested people to contact SANDRA BARDWELL at 88 4878 before making definite arrangements.

NEW ROAD IN THE UPPER WONNANGATTA VALLEY

The commencement of logging in the Mt. Despair area, Upper Wonnangatta Valley around 1970 caused the largest (to that date) protest over logging activities in the Alps. Numerous organizations got together and protested to such an extent that a meeting was held on 20th September, 1972, between conservationists and the then Minister for Forests, Mr. E.R. Meagher, and representatives of the Forests Commission. At this meeting, the Minister stated: "the country east and west of the (Mt. Despair) logging area would be maintained in a primitive roadless state. This included... the Mt. Howitt - Terrible Hollow area". (Report of the Meeting, 16/10/72. J.G. Mosley).

In January 1978 the Forests Commission bulldozed a new road through the head of the Upper Wonnangatta linking up the Mt. Despair logging road to the Wonnangatta road system, right through the area which was to have been kept in "a primitive roadless state". According to Dr. R. Grose of the Forests Commission at a V.N.P.A. meeting on 10th May, 1978, the decision to put the road through was made by the Minister for Forests, Mr. Granter. Below we reproduce, without comment, correspondence between M.U.M.C. and the Minister over this issue. You can draw your own conclusions.

M.U.M.C. to Hon. F.J. Granter (Minister for Forests) 6/3/78:

"Dear Sir,

Members of this club were appalled to recently discover a new road bulldozed up the Wonnangatta valley in Gippsland to connect the existing road networks in the Wonnangatta Valley and in the Mt. Speculation - Mt. Despair area. This road cuts right through the heart of one of the few remaining wilderness areas in the Victorian alps and was put through (this January) at a very critical time as the Land Conservation Council are currently studying the area. There appears to have been no really pressing reason for constructing the road.. There was one fire in the area but this was not a major one and was only at one end of the road near an existing fire access track. All the available evidence leads us to conclude that the road was put in before the L.C.C. finished studying the area in an attempt by the Forests Commission to ensure the existence of a road regardless of the outcome of the L.C.C. deliberations. If so this is deplorable - and we point out that there is no evidence contrary to this point.

We regard this road as an abomination which has partially destroyed one of our few remaining wilderness areas. The trail bike and 4 wheel drive owners who will soon use the road will complete the destruction of this wilderness. Words fail to express our anger and disgust with the Forests Commission for having built this road. Day by day with one example after the other of such selfish thoughtless actions by the Forests Commission, bushwalkers become increasingly angry and frustrated. We request that this road be immediately closed, then ripped up and revegetated".

NEW ROAD IN THE UPPER WONNANGATTA VALLEY (Continued)

Minister of Forests to M.U.M.C. (14/3/78):

"I have your letter of 6 March 1978 concerning recent track construction in the upper section of the Wonnangatta river valley.

The assumptions and inferences expressed in your letter about the track are quite wrong, and I must emphatically reject your imputations about the Forest Commission's motivations for constructing the track.

For your information, the track was constructed after thorough examination had determined the essential need for it in the forest fire situation that prevailed at the time. The decision taken to construct this particular track included that it was a temporary fire-access track and that it would be closed and allowed to revegetate; and that is precisely what will happen.

May I add two further comments. I am astounded at the selfish attitudes apparent in your letter with respect to your Club's appreciation of what is required to cope with forest fire situations such as existed in the Buffalo, Wonnangatta and Moroka rivers in January. Secondly, had it not been for the strategies adopted and the tremendous endeavours of hundreds of men fighting the Buffalo and Wonnangatta river fires, the wilderness to which you refer would now be burnt out".

M.U.M.C. to Minister of Forests (28/3/78)

"We feel compelled to reply to a letter you recently sent us (14 March, 1978) in response to a letter we sent you concerning the construction of a new road in the upper Wonnangatta valley.

We are pleased to hear that this road is to be closed but we urge you to ensure that this is done as soon as possible. Having seen the fire and the area in question we are still convinced that the road was not necessary for fire fighting purposes. The damage the road has done to the area far outweighs the damage done by the fire in our opinion. We would like to make it quite clear that we would prefer any day walk in burnt out forests in the area concerned than to walk through unburnt but roaded forests, as we now have.

You accuse us of having selfish attitudes. We fail to understand why. It is not us, but rather those who continually deny us the opportunity to experience wilderness, who must be considered selfish. There were no property values or probably human lives at risk by the Wonnangatta fire, but there were certainly wilderness values to consider. The lack of consideration shown to wilderness values in this, and all similar instances, clearly illustrates the selfish attitudes of those who are apparently incapable of considering the wilderness user. We would add that this road affects us as deeply as if someone had driven a bulldozer right through our back gardens.

There is so little wilderness left in Victoria for the greatly increased numbers of people who wish to experience it that, whenever another remnant disappears, the situation becomes increasingly intolerable."

"I acknowledge your letter of 28 March and in reply must state, as I did in my letter to you of 14 March, that I am astounded at the attitude and lack of understanding expressed by your Club about the most dangerous fire situation that existed in the mountain forests during January. Your statement that "there were no property values or probably human lives at risk" shows complete ignorance of what can happen in an extreme drought when fires run uncontrolled through Victorian forests.

I find your attitude even more remarkable because it comes from an organisation which I would expect to be better informed. One only has to know something of the disastrous fires of 1939 and 1965 in Victoria to realise that the fires last January posed an immediate threat to life and property, as well as complete devastation of forests and wildlife.

If your members are not aware of the reality of the situation then I suggest they read the Report of the Royal Commission into the 1939 bushfires and the book written last year by W.A. Noble, "Ordeal by Fire - The week a State burned up", and try to understand that there is more involved than the interests expressed in your letter. The Government fully appreciate and supports the concept of wilderness but realises that it cannot do so to the exclusion of all other interests".

M.U.M.C. to Minister of Forests (24/4/78)

"Our Club views with concern the comments you have made to us in recent correspondence concerning the construction of a road in the upper Wonnangatta. We believe we have been misinformed because some of the comments in your last letter (12th April) are simply not true.

You stated in this letter that the fires last January posed "an immediate threat to life and property as well as complete devastation of forests and wildlife". This is not true. Where were the lives and property threatened? The nearest permanent residence was many kilometres away from the Wonnangatta fire. If there were any people in the area at the time they would have had ample time to escape because the fire, we repeat, was not a particularly serious one. We have walked through the area burnt by the fire - from valley bottom to ridge-top. Absolutely nowhere did we see any crowning which occurs with the most extreme fires. In many areas the crowns of the trees were not even touched, only the understorey was burnt. We did not see a single dead bird or animal - not even a skeleton. We saw many ants, lizards, and birds. We saw banksias seeding and new shoots of grass everywhere. Obviously, the fire did not threaten complete devastation of forests and wildlife. The fire was not that serious because it did not crown. It even went out of its own accord when it came to some gullies.

You ask us if we have read the Report of the Royal Commission into the 1939 bushfire or the book written by W.A. Noble. We ask you if you have read the submission by the Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs to the L.C.C. concerning the Alpine Area in which fire management in wilderness areas is discussed, or the articles referred to in the F.V.W.C. submission - articles by Mutch et al. or the numerous articles in the Tall Timbers Fire Ecology Conference No. 14, or other work by Stankey on wilderness fire policy or articles in the Tall Timbers Fire Ecology Conference No. 15. All of this research was conducted during the 1970's.

NEW ROAD IN THE UPPER WONNANGATTA VALLEY (Continued)

All of this research has been carried out in forests every bit as inflammable as ours, and all of this research comes to one conclusion - in wilderness areas it is undesirable to put all fires out.

Fire fighting techniques and knowledge of fire behaviour and ecology have all changed dramatically in the last 30 years. Land use problems have also become more complex so that what was appropriate in the 1930's or 40's is not necessarily appropriate today. The road in the Wonnangatta represents an antiquated, clumsy, and uninformed approach to the fire problem. The decision to build it was selfish, due to the lack of consideration of wilderness values and is highly regrettable. It has caused nothing but bitterness among bushwalkers, most of whom believe the road was not necessary to fight the fire but was put in for other purposes. We condemn it and will continue to do so until it is ripped up and allowed to revegetate."

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

The Annual General Meeting of the Melbourne University Mountaineering Club will be held in the Sisalkraft Theatre Architecture building, Melbourne University at 8p.m. on Tuesday the 18th March 1980.

Nominations are called for the positions of

President

Vice President

Secretary

Assistant Secretary

Treasurer

Editor of the club journal

Stores Officer

Publications officer

Reports on the various sections of the club will be presented.

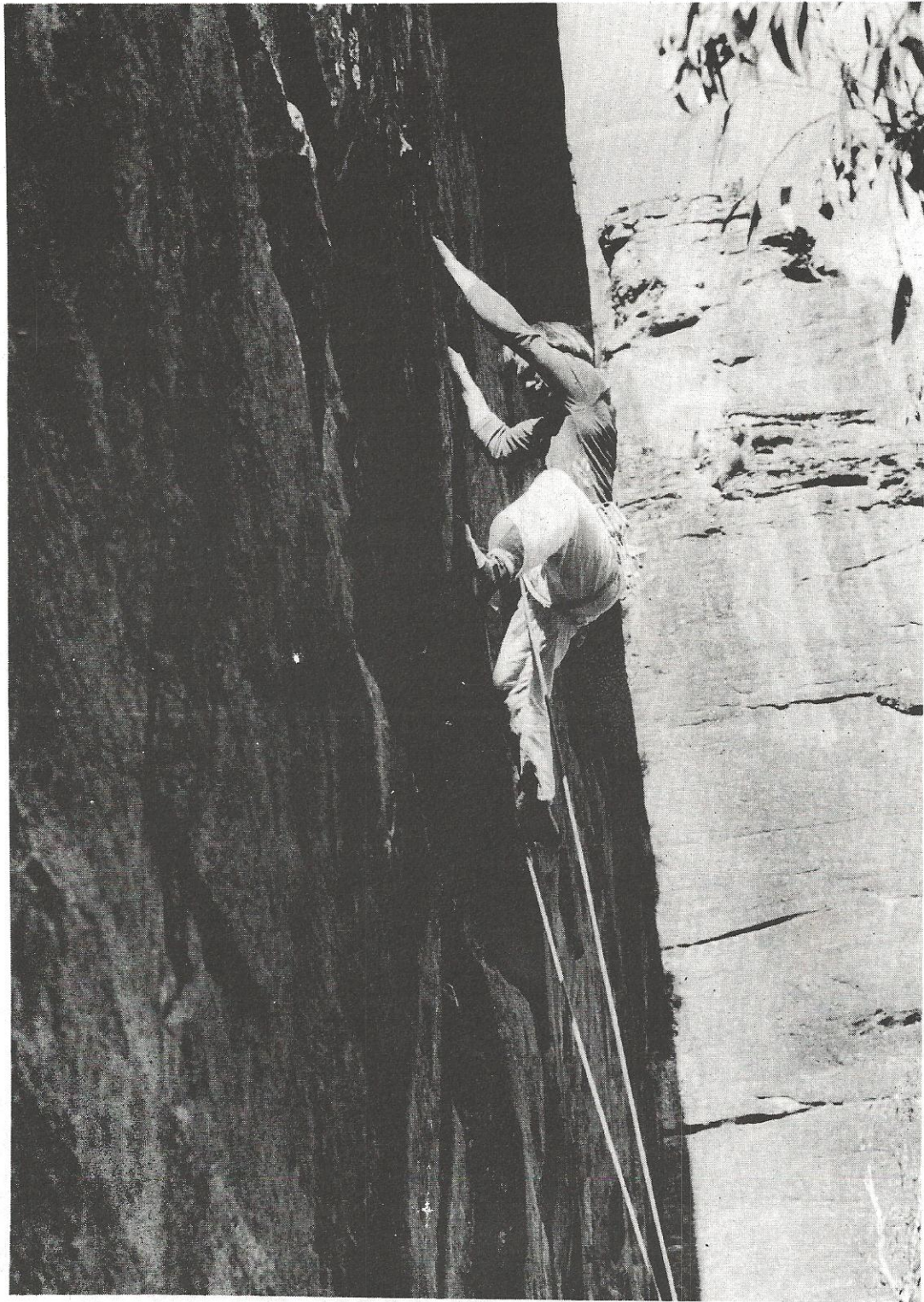
Constitutional amendments will be voted on as the Secretary has received notice of same. Details of the amendments are available from the secretary and will be circulated at the A.G.M.

SPEAKER

The speaker will be Andy Rothfield who will speak and show slides on his trips to Nepal and North America.

ALL CLUB MEMBERS ARE URGED TO ATTEND!!

MOUNTAIN EQUIPMENT



Tobin Sorenson on "Thin Time" 22. Photo G.Harrison - Mountain Equipment.

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