



THE
MOUNTAINEER
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03 Administrivia

Presidential Decree
From The Convenors
Pie & Slide Night 2006

08 My First Snow Bollard

LINCOLN SMITH

14 Lake Tali Karng

ANDREW OPPENHEIM

16 Grand Canyon

GRACE PHANG

18 Ned Carves Mt. Nelse

STEVE CHAN, CALLUM EASTWOOD AND SU LI SIN

16 Midnight Ascent

FELIX DANCE

24 Larapinta Trail

SAM FLEWETT AND JAMES SOUTHWELL

16 Summer Day Valley

SIMON MCKENZIE

30 Little Desert Treeplanting

STEVE CHAN

32 Paddling: A Beginner's Perspective

GRACE PHANG

34 Another Paddling

JEN SHERIDAN

35 Recommended Canyons

ALISON THOMSON

38 Thomson River

MAC BRUNCKHORST

39 Not Quite Nowra

SEAN GRIFFITHS

40 Rogaining

ALAN DALEY

41 The White Line

STUART HOLLAWAY

42 Fergus River

SHANNON CRACK

43 Mt. Langi Ghiran

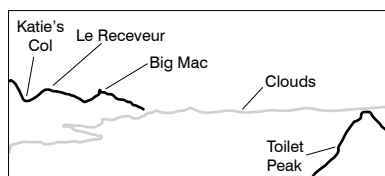
SU LI SIN

44 The Unseen Stone

STUART HOLLAWAY

COVER

From Pioneer Hut (Fox Glacier, New Zealand), a surreal vista is captured by Simon McKenzie in the 2005/2006 mountaineering season with the Club. The main features are labelled in the diagram (right) but it doesn't show the Fox Neve—the smooth bit at the bottom.



ABOVE

A Larapinta billabong photographed by James Southwell on a twelve-day walk in the Northern Territory. His journey is featured in this issue.



LINCOLN SMITH
President

PRESIDENTIAL DECREE

I guess I will open my little spiel by welcoming everyone to MUMC for 2007: to returning members, I hope you had a great summer; to new members, drop by the Clubrooms soon—this magazine is just a taste of what we get up to over the course of a year.

I like to think that there is something for pretty much everyone at MUMC: from high-volume creeking and virgin cave exploration to indulging botanical interests with a walk through the Grampians in all its spring glory.

To new and returning Club members, MUMC is whatever you make of it. We'll do our best if you need help getting started, although older or experienced members don't have a monopoly on trip ideas. If you have a hare-brained scheme for doing activity X at location Y, then organise a trip! Don't think your technical skills are adequate? Ask around and get clarification, or enlist the help of more experienced members—you'll find us overjoyed at the idea of someone *else* taking us on a trip—to help you learn the appropriate skills.

To newcomers, wandering into the Clubrooms for the first time on a Tuesday evening can be intimidating—particularly when the climbers and boaters seem to be speaking an alien language—but we're just a bunch of people who enjoy being outdoors, and want to share our enthusiasm with like-minded people.

It can all seem like organised chaos, especially at the start of the year, but grab a Committee member (we're the slightly stressed looking people being asked 101 things by twenty people at once), and tell them what you're interested in. They can get you headed in the right direction and explain how the Club works, though the only real way to experience MUMC is to come on a trip (or twelve).

If you sign up for our Introductory Trip, that will give you a taste, but the real MUMC is a lot less of school camp, and a lot more of having a great time in the outdoors with good friends, even if some of them seem slightly odd at times.

I'll finish up by extending my heartfelt thanks to all those in the Club Committee, and in the Club at large, who've kept the pot bubbling over summer, especially our tireless Publications Officer and Webmaster, Steve Chan. I think you'll agree he's done a spectacular job with this edition of the Mountaineer.

Lincoln Smith
President

CONTACTING THE EDITOR

For questions about this publication or the contents thereof:
Stephen Chan
Publications Officer
publications@mumc.org.au

MUMC ONLINE

Find out more about the Club and how to join by visiting our website.
www.mumc.org.au

GENERAL ENQUIRIES

For specific questions about the Club:
Secretary
secretary@mumc.org.au

MAILING ADDRESS

MUMC
c/o Melbourne University Sport
University of Melbourne
3010

FROM OUR CLUB CONVENORS

Caving Shannon Crack

caving@mumc.org.au

After very little activity in first semester of 2006 due to the absence of the Caving Convenor; the last half of the year saw a number of trips. There was a beginner's trip to Labertouche and a number of trips to Buchan where people learnt the skills required for vertical caving. This included the specifically-run training weekend at Buchan in October, where several people were taught the necessary skills and embarked on their first vertical caving trip (definition: vertical caving = abseiling and ascending rope required).

We continued running joint trips with other clubs including trips to Buchan with La Trobe University Mountaineering Club. Some of our members joined Sydney University Speleological Society on trips in NSW to Yarangabilly in the Snowy Mountains, and Jenolan in the Blue Mountains.

February 2007 has another vertical skills training weekend planned and then with the influx of new members from O-Week, March and April see a number of specific beginners trips. These include day trips to Labertouche and weekend trips to Buchan. Further ahead expect more training trips for vertical caving skills—particularly important, as many of the more interesting caves at Buchan require these skills. We'll continue to run joint trips with other clubs both locally and interstate, the latter allowing us to expand areas where we cave. Of particular note is the possibility of trips to Naracoorte in SA and Yarangabilly in NSW.

On average, the Club ran one caving trip a month for second semester of 2006, and expects to run at least that for 2007, hopefully to some places we don't visit as often.

Skiing Alison Thomson

ski@mumc.org.au

There were four skiing trips in August 2006 to Mt. Nelse, the Fainters, Mt. Feathertop and Lake Mountain. I shouldn't jinx this year's ski season by making lots of plans for 2007, so I won't mention things like:

- Intermediate/Advanced Telemark Clinic.
- Learn to Skate Clinic.
- Snow Shelters touring trip: having learnt from recent experience that freezing on the side of a mountain in a white-out is *not* the time to be building your first ever snow-cave.
- Beginner pre-season info session.
- Intermediate ski maintenance session.
- Beginner day trips to St. Gwinear (Baw Baw Plateau) and Lake Mountain.
- Beginner touring trips to Mt. Stirling and the High Plains
- Intermediate/Advanced adventures to Bogong, Feathertop, and the Fainters.

If you like the sound of this, be on the pre-season "Snow Sacrifice Trip" to Mt. Bogong...

Kayaking/Canoe Polo Jen Sheridan & Mac Brunckhorst

kayaking@mumc.org.au

Usually at this point in the year kayakers would be brimming with tales of rivers run. And while the lack of rain has been something of an impediment to this, happily a large amount of paddling has still been going on. We were lucky enough to gather a crew for a midweek paddle on the Mitchell River—the only river to come up due to rainfall in many months. Numerous trips to the beach have improved playboating and rolling skills, and regular pool sessions have been a great way to learn some of these skills for the first time, as was the beginners' trip to the Yarra. Even more exciting have been the recent dam releases, which allowed paddlers to take on the Lower Mitta, the Goulburn River and the Thomson River.

With a distinct lack of rain, meanwhile many paddlers looked further afield for their paddling fun. A group of our female paddlers took on the White Nile in Uganda, and remained there until mid-November, while others stayed closer to home, and headed down to Tassie for the Lea race.

Until our raindances and sacrifices start working, maybe we'll see you at the pool, on a wave, or on a dam-release river somewhere.

Rockclimbing Simon McKenzie

rockclimbing@mumc.org.au

Climbing is moving back towards Arapiles and the Grampians as the weather improves, with many of our new leaders taking on responsibilities running trips and generally improving their skills. For those of you who are interested by the idea of climbing, but feel that it requires too much skill or "upper body strength", please think again!

There are climbs for all skill levels, and as you climb more, you come to realise that it's not about strength, but about balance and thinking on your feet. It's all about feet, in fact! Come and talk to any of the Club's regular climbers on a Tuesday night, and have some great adventures with us!

Bushwalking

Marina Carpinelli

bushwalking@mumc.org.au

Like the weather, bushwalking heated up early last Spring, with heaps of trips happening. There have been daywalks galore: bunyip-seeking at Bunyip state park; treeferns, lyrebirds and mud at Mt. Worth; fence hopping along clifftops at San Remo; scenic walking and pub lunches at Lerderderg Gorge.

Longer trips have included a trip that took in the spectacular scenery around the Fortress in the Grampians; a three-day trip to Lake Tali Karng; the classic Southern Wilson's Promontory Circuit complete with stops for swimming and a weekend walk through melting snow on the Baw Baw Plateau. Not only has there been great walking, there have also been many great milkshakes consumed—the best (in the author's opinion) being from the Big Stump Café in Darnum.

There were many more walks planned for the summer, including daywalks to the Mornington Peninsula, Cathedrals, Fraser National Park and the Otways. There were also a number of trips planned for Tasmania, including a trip to the legendary South Coast Track. Most of the trips are suitable for beginners so there is no excuse to stay away from bushwalking in 2007.

Conservation

Bronwyn Hradsky

conservation@mumc.org.au

Winter and spring have been busy times for MUMC's conservationists. Winter brings the rain (sometimes), and rain brings the tree plantings. And even if it doesn't rain, you can always bucket water onto your seedlings!

We've been back to Benalla several times, working with the Regent Honeyeater Project to restore habitat for these endangered birds. We also joined the Hindmarsh Project to plant over 25 hectares of degraded farmland in a day near the Little Desert National Park. There was a nest-box checking weekend with the Regent Honeyeater Project, where many of us saw our first sugar and squirrel gliders. We've also run several trips with Parks Victoria, one working to slow water flow and erosion of burnt and trampled sphagnum mossbeds in the High Plains, and another highly memorable track-clearing adventure to Lake Tali Karng.

MUMC Conservation takes an active role in political issues, and we collected donations to send to the VNPA's campaign for a national park along the Murray River to protect the River Red Gums. Without the natural environment, we couldn't climb, paddle, hike, ski or go caving. It's up to us to protect this precious resource. So, if you want to get your gumboots muddy, see some cute animals, perfect your pick-swinging, bushdance all night and eat heaps of free food, sign up for a Conservation trip!

Mountaineering

Dale Thistlethwaite

mountaineering@mumc.org.au

Summer 2006/2007 has been another fantastic year for mountaineering in the MUMC. New Zealand was so full of club members this year with various paddlers, climbers, walkers and alpinists heading over for a taste of Kiwi that it was hard to scull a Monteith's without spilling it on someone you knew.

Matty Doyle started his season by climbing Mt. Lendenfeld (2). He then attempted Glacier Peak but had to retreat from high on the west ridge (3-) after his climbing partner dropped an axe. Next they climbed Mt. Sefton (3-) from the west coast, via the Copeland Valley and Scott's Creek, before being joined by Lachie Currie for a trip into Plateau Hut, where they attempted Mt. Dixon's south ridge and watched it snow (a lot). Matty is currently continuing his alpine odyssey in Canada climbing ice.

Parallel to Matty and Lachie's adventures Stuart Hollaway and ex-MUMC member, turned hard climber and crux mag sex-symbol, Phil Blunsom, were also in Plateau. They climbed two new lines, the first on Mt. Dixon (4?)—the "Cave Variant" with a very technical crux which climbs out around the roof of an ice cave, leading onto the south ridge. The second new line, The Middle Path (6), climbs the Balfour face of Mt. Tasman via a steep runnel and chimney feature with a crux of tight, mixed climbing on the fourth pitch.

After Christmas and lots more snow, Stuart Hollaway, Ben Hawthorne and Lachie Currie headed up the Hooker glacier but conditions restricted them to a couple of days of ice cragging around the bottom of the south face of Mt. Hicks. By now thoroughly sick of snow, Lachie and Ben elected to head north to sunny Payne's Ford for some cragging.

Meanwhile, Alison Thomson and Lincoln Smith, our dynamic skiing/canyoning convenor/presidential duo, climbed Mt. Earnslaw (2-), Mt. Jervois (2) including a rather exciting looking pinnacle traverse, and the Minarets (2).

I feel greatly privileged to have been convenor during three years of such frenetic mountaineering activity in the MUMC. To everyone who headed into the New Zealand alps to climb this year, we're proud of you, keep up the good work. To anyone considering getting involved in mountaineering, there really is something for everyone, from easy-angled, Grade 1 snow peaks at Arthur's Pass, to death-defying, technical adventures on the Balfour, come along to the club rooms and get involved.

PIE & SLIDE NIGHT 2006

The Club holds a friendly annual photography competition. Below is a selection of (not all) category winners from 2006. There were many excellent contributions this year.

Prizes and credits go to video, slide and digital photography entrants in a number of categories. Such prizes are awarded by a panel of judges and are sponsored by outdoors stores such as Anaconda and Snowgum. Viewing the photography is free, but you have to pay for your own beer and pies.



OVERALL WINNER NED ROGERS The Eagle

An eagle in Makarora Valley, New Zealand.



RUNNER-UP JAMES SOUTHWELL Larapinta Ghost Gums

This slide is also printed in Southwell's Larapinta Trail feature. It's a photo of ghost gums at Ellery Creek, Northern Territory.



HONOURABLE MENTION OLIVER CLARKE Silhouettes on Mt. Fainter North

A photograph of Mt. Fainter North summit during the ski season of 2006. The season was not very good that year.

The silhouettes, from left to right, belong to the following intrepid souls: Grace Phang, Eugenie Chung, Matthew Thomas, Alison Thomson.



ACTION

LINCOLN SMITH

Joel Bartley on Quartz Route

***Quartz Route (17) is a three-bolt 18m granite climb at The Main Group, Mt. Beckworth, near Ballarat.



FLORA & FAUNA

GRACE PHANG

Autumn Life

These toadstools were found in Alfred Nicholas Gardens, Dandenong Ranges, Melbourne.



OVERSEAS LANDSCAPE

OLIVER CLARKE

Sunset From Miri

A sunset taken from the waterfront of Miri, a small town on the coast of Sarawak, in Malaysian Borneo.



MY FIRST SNOW BOLLARD

Not a Fisher-Price toy, but the adventures of Lincoln and Alison in New Zealand, where snow actually falls.



LIKE THE IDEA of doing a warm up walk, or small alpine peak, before heading to the high mountain huts of New Zealand. It eases you into the mood, lubricates those joints that are stiff from being squeezed into a playboat, and hopefully blows out the technical cobwebs; thus I was amenable to Al's suggestion that we attempt Mt. Earnslaw before heading onto the Franz Josef Glacier for the focus of our trip.

Earnslaw lies about an hour's drive north of Queenstown, on the range that splits the Rees and Dart valleys (which together form the Rees-Dart track, a walk I highly recommend). Access is typically gained by walking up the Rees valley, and then heading up past Kea Basin to Esquilant Bivvy—a lovely little hut in a spectacular setting on Wright Col.

As an aside, the walk up to Esquilant Bivvy and back would make a great two-to-three day outing—as long as you don't intend on climbing any of the surrounding peaks, it requires little in the way of alpine skills other than being competent with an ice axe and crampons. As long as you pick good weather to avoid getting caught in a white-out, the navigation is very straight forward, and the terrain is non-technical. Combining that with the Rees-Dart track would make a varied and thoroughly enjoyable walk of about a week's duration.

The little information we could find suggested Earnslaw is essentially a walk with the potential for a bit of scrambling, but you quickly learn that in an alpine setting, what *is* and what is *meant to be* can have little in common. Neither Queenstown nor the Glenorchy DOC offices were much help—none of the climbers who had been through recently had bothered to inform them of conditions—Morgan at Outside Sports in Queenstown was another matter.

Morgan climbed Earnslaw a fortnight earlier with a couple of friends, and proceeded to rave to us over the course of half an hour or so, brushing off customers, pulling out maps and updated guide books...now that's service! He even offered to show us his photos if we came back in a couple of days.

Prior to his account I'd been planning on taking one ice tool, and like any good pack mule, looking for a way to ditch the rope, which would also mean no snow stakes, harness, or carabiners; a substantial space and weight saving! Such ideas evaporated as Morgan spoke of pitched climbing using two tools, and I didn't feel we could write them off as hacks—they'd made impressive time up and back to the trail head...

Al summiting the Minarets. In the background is Mt. Cook, the big trapezoid-shaped feature. The prominent peak to the right is Mt. Tasman. Left of frame is the Tasman Glacier, which runs down that big valley.

WE SET OUT from Muddy Creek car park at midday and, having crossed the Rees River, reached the rock bivvies (bivouacs) of Kea Basin at 4:30PM. The rock bivvies are substantial overhung rocks that provide shelter from even the most inclement weather; there are rock walls to break the wind, and even a resident bible. They're also the last decent shelter until you reach Esquilant Bivvy, some 700m in altitude further on.

With the forecast predicting the wind to increase to decidedly unpleasant levels that evening, and the freezing level to drop precipitously at the same time, did we think we could make it to the hut before the cloud slowed us, and the scouring wind stopped us? We thought we could.

On the approach I'd studied the route to Wright Col intensely, fortunately fixing in my mind the procession of features that would mark our route if the weather worsened—which it did. None of the things that slowed us down were unanticipated: the snow was crusty and I had to break trail; the unsurprising fact that Al can't walk as fast as I can. Yet by 8PM or 8:30PM—not far off the time I'd estimated we'd reach the col—the peaks above us had long been eclipsed by cloud, and the col was still some distance away. It wasn't that surprising that 9 o'clock found us below Leary Peak, being buffeted by the rising gale.

"Lincoln, I'm pretty stuffed. If we're going to build a snow cave, I think we should do it now while we still have the energy."

"Okay, here's as good as anywhere."

"Do you know how to build a snow cave?"

"Kind of."

"Have you actually built one before?"

"Well, no. Have you?"

"No."

"Well I guess we should just start digging into the hillside for starters..."

"We can also bury the packs and then pull them out..." [a technique used to construct a hollow cave-like structure in snow.]

You see, I knew where we were. It's just that inside a glass of milk it's hard to even know how steep the ground is that you're standing on. We could keep walking on our bearing, but might wander right past the hut and never know it. With the weather worsening, wandering around trying to find the hut was not a smart idea. I resolved to bring a GPS next time.

"I can see the side of Earnslaw. Holy shit, I can see the side of Earnslaw!" I exclaimed, starting to size up the area the snow cave should go.

"What?"

"There's a break in the cloud, I can see the other side of the col!"

"Eh?"

"I can see where we need to go!"

"Go, just go! Run! I can follow your tracks!"

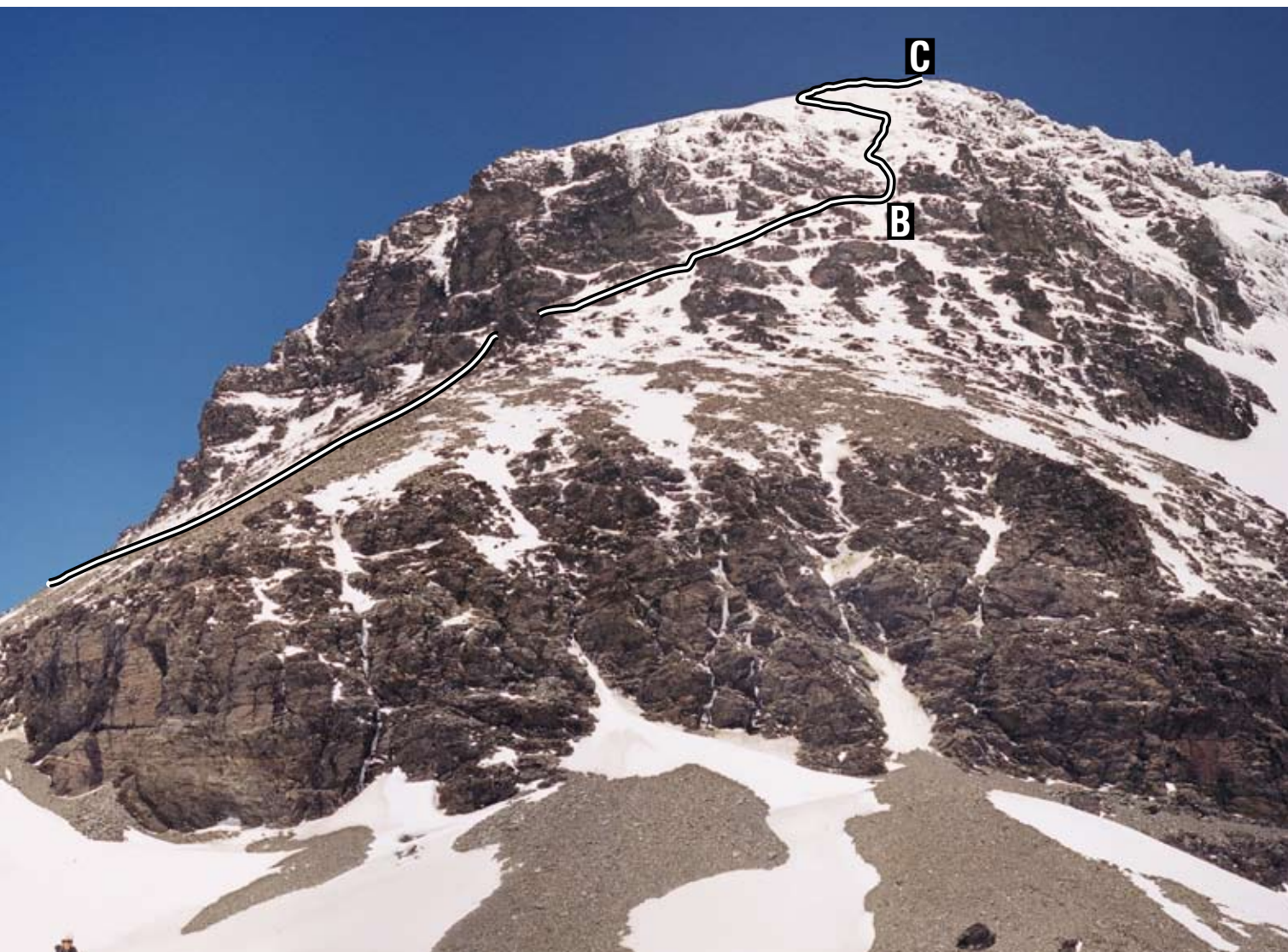
The break remained long enough for us to reach the hut without further complications. We fell to eating and drinking, and it was past midnight before the beckoning calls of our sleeping bags were answered.

Next morning I was relieved to hear the gale outside still knocking at the door; relieved because it meant we wouldn't be climbing today, and therefore I didn't have

Mt. Earnslaw East Peak 2837m (9308ft)



Al (visible below the big lumpy rock outcrop on the right-hand side) passing through the slopes of scree and snow. The route passes behind this outcrop, as indicated on the main image (top right).



A

This is a rising traverse on a snow slope. Half the slope had already released in a slab avalanche, and we had to traverse over the bit that was still—for now—stuck to the mountainside (behind the mountain in the above image). It freaked me out, even though the consequence of it releasing was negligible. The run-out was safe and the slab layer was thin.

Towards the top the snow hardened until we were on our front points; Al got out her second tool, I kept climbing on one, mostly because I was too scared to try and get the second one out!

On a happier note, we could see our tracks from two days ago; the line of the rising traverse I'd led us on was a beeline from the end of the scree to the col, only dipping off-course in our final frantic rush. The precision of that bit of whiteout navigation left me feeling pretty chuffed.

B

The crux of the route; a short chimney/couloir, normally a scramble, evidently protectable with rock gear (if you brought some—we didn't). In our case, the wintry conditions had created a 70-odd degree ice bulge with a poor runout. We could have protected it with ice gear—if we'd brought any—but the transition to pitched climbing for a few metres of steep ice would waste too much time...so we soloed it. I don't know whether that makes us officially "hardcore" but it was certainly...er, "focussed" climbing until you were clear of the crappy snow-over-ice at the top.

On the descent, the absence of a more traditional anchor—combined with our reluctance to down climb what was now rotting ice—led to the creation of My First Snow Bollard, which is a mound carved out of snow and used in anchor systems for a descent.

We didn't die, and I built another one later when we climbed the Minarets. Sweet as, bro.

C

The summit. Another good photo of Al was taken here. There are photos of me, but I look stupid. That pretty much sums up every appearance by me in a photo on this trip. Look at the gallery on the club website if you want proof.

It was sunny, there was just a slight breeze, I felt like spewing when I tried to eat chocolate—due to low blood sugar—and my over-amorous advances on Al were rebuffed (no-one else was going to summit that day...). It was awesome.

Although it was later than we wanted to summit (it was 10:30AM) we'd decided we were happy to trade the \$110 on a wasted bus fare for a summit in such glorious weather. When the NZ weather relents, you grab what you can.



to get out of my sleeping bag just yet. The howling of the gale may have been frustration—I wasn't going to let it in, at least not until the pee-bottle was full.

My sleep is typically broken, even more so with the anticipation of a climb coursing through my veins. In the periods of wakefulness I watched through the little window above me as the sky cleared, and listened as the frustrated howl withdrew. I resigned myself to the fact that I was going to have to get *out* of my sleeping bag, and that I was going to have to eat breakfast—*quelle horreur!* At five in the morning, breakfast muesli is as palatable as reflux after an indulgent meal.

A wonderful thing about climbing Earnslaw from Esquilant Bivvy is that there is no approach. You just leave the hut and start climbing.

THE DESCENT AND walk out was long, uneventful, and towards the end, somewhat uncomfortable. We got back to the car at

10:30PM. On the drive back to Queenstown there were possums all over the road. In New Zealand possums have the same status as cane toads here, but I was in a (very small) hire car, and didn't want to cop a cleaning fee for returning it covered in gore. I decided I wouldn't swerve to hit them if they got out of the way. I splatted only one bunny rabbit, and had two micro-sleeps. I'd have stopped and had a snooze, but I wasn't certain I'd wake up in time to return the car. Still, they scared the pants off me. Not recommended.

TO OUR RELIEF—we'd dreaded the possibility they might have sold our room when we didn't arrive—the backpackers' had left our keys and a friendly note in an envelope at the now-closed reception. It was almost 2AM before we were in bed; unsurprisingly, sleep came quickly. **IM**



A knife-edge cornice on Mt. Jervis, with AI following. This was a pretty scary lead; the little imprints are where I held on to the top of the cornice. The little step AI is on was the scariest part of the traverse. The snow was quite loose—not reassuring at all! (above).

Lincoln at Esquilant Bivvy (opposite, top). Esquilant Bivvy is a serviced hut, which means it offers bunks or sleeping platforms with mattresses, heating and plumbing.

AI on the summit of Mt. Earnslaw (opposite, bottom). The nearby, prominent feature left-of-frame is the West Peak of Mt. Earnslaw, 2822m (9261ft) in altitude.

LAKE TALİ KARNG

BY ANDREW OPPENHEIM

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PHILIPP MONDEN AND MARLENA MENDE



Lake Tali Karng (above) with a view of the area surrounding the Crinoline (main). Late afternoon sunlight highlights The Crinoline near the centre of frame. Spurs line the Wellington River valley in the foreground.

THAT SPRING BREAK is used to describe the final weeks of September suggests a light and carefree attitude, and the potential for travel. This time is also well suited to visiting the hills of Gippsland, since the sun can be warm, snow might remain and the flies do not yet trouble.

Tali Karng was not known to many of those I was talking with during term. Perhaps it was enough to explain that it is a lake with no road access that sits south-east of Mt. Buller, halfway to Sale. Some outdoors types recalled memories of jarring knees when descending Gillio's Track or of wading across the Wellington River many times on a hot summer's day.

This trip had been billed as more than a beginners' walk and I wanted to stay as dry as possible, so our approach was to be via Mt. Margaret. Philipp, Jeremiah, Marlena and I left the car on the Tamboritha Road just north of Licola and headed along a trickling creek to the base of a spur. The climb was through open forest, the spurs well-defined and the walking simple if needing exertion. Fine views were captured, and the first of the spring wildflowers were out, along with some acacia blossom.



The side of Mt. Margaret is a rocky outcrop, but exploration around that and the spurs that spread northwards like fingers were left for another trip. Instead we went east off the ridge, contouring around until we latched on to a downward spur. This path draws you in to Tali Karng more than the other approaches, with regular views of the Sentinels, Spion Kopje and other peaks that surround the hidden lake. In the quiet grasslands around the Chromite Mine on the Dolodrook river we exchanged pleasantries with Jim Harker of the Victorian Mountain Tramping Club, one of two people we encountered during the walk.

The reward for then ascending Brandy Pinch was being able to admire the Crinoline silhouetted in late afternoon light. In all, an invigorating day's walking.

The fine weather had been forecast to disappear; by the next morning it was still making up its mind. We decided to pass through the fantastically named Valley of Destruction that runs west from Tali Karng. After a pleasant and gentle walk we regrouped on the cusp of the lake's basin. We found the water level high and the surface rocking gently with the wind. On cue, the

sun broke through and we had a splendid fifteen minutes of sunbaking by the shore.

When the rain returned a little heavier, we set off for Echo Point. This track is situated cleverly; it is hard to imagine the work involved in plotting and constructing tracks, things for which modern walkers can forget to be grateful. A folded tin sign with scribbles from groups back to the fifties is attached to a tree near the top.

As if on cue, at Echo Point the sun prevailed again, for just long enough to eat with the view of the lake. Cheeses, avocados, leafy greens, tomatoes and various other salad vegetables joined tuna mixes and pita breads. The building weather finally brewed up a storm that brought thunder, lightning and hail to our journey down Riggalls Spur. Nonetheless the partial views through cloud indicated that this is an attractive and easy journey.

At the river, the storm appeared spent, so we took a ramble westwards, high enough above the swift-flowing river to enjoy good views, and with a mob of kangaroos hopping around the path also. I last had walked through this area twelve years ago, long enough for old logs now to show signs of

decrepitude. I wonder whether time had flattened my memory of the campsite, or spread out the trees. Our dinner was completed with Turkish delight and fine chocolate, after which the others suggested a walk under the cloudless sky to ease digestion.

This was the night of fruitless despair, when the apricot, peach and plum crop was caught in a frost, but at the time for us meant only a fine and sunny day.

A surprise along the way was a stray cow that ran improbably fast. Our return to the Dolodrook valley and its frogs brought determination to the idea of rambles into the surrounding hills. I sighed contentedly at morning tea, relaxed and ready for many more days' walking.

Thanks to my walking companions: Philipp Monden, mountain goat; Jeremiah Steele, purveyor of fine snacks and sweets; and Marlena Mende, who stuck with this trip through a week when it seemed it was not going to run. ■

PHOTOS: MARLENA MENDE (MAIN); PHILIPP MONDEN (INSET)



GRAND CANYON

Al, Linky and others go splishy-splashy in one of New South Wales' canyons.

ADDITIONAL PHOTO: SU LI SIN (GOVETT'S LEAP)

BY GRACE PHANG
ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY BY SU LI SIN

AT ONE OF the ritual Tuesday meetings, Al mentioned, 'We'll take a couple of beginners canyoning for two days, if you'd like to come.' My reply was, 'Hell, yeah!' I was like a kid with a new present that night, all excited and pumped up.

AT THE TIME, I thought canyoning was abseiling down a huge rock cliff into a valley—but it wasn't really what it turned out to be. 'A wetsuit and old shoes is a must; no questions about that,' Al said. *I wonder how cold it can really get.* I was pretty much game for any exciting adventures during the spring break.

It didn't take me long to convince a partner in crime, Eugenie, to come along on the trip. Neither of us knew what was in store for us. We spent the next week arranging transportation, finishing up assignments and hunting for secondhand wetsuits.

TAKING AN OVERNIGHT train up to Sydney on Monday 18th September, we caught another train to Blackheath, Blue Mountains and met up with Al and Lincoln at the train station at 10AM the next day.

Next up, they took us to the holiday home they'd rented—a really neat and pretty place. We briefly met up with a couple of other mountaineering people, dumped our bags, sorted out gear (thermals, wetsuit, helmet, harness, karabiner, figure-eight, prussik cord, slings and rope) and off we were on my first ever canyoning expedition—Grand Canyon!

It was a short walk from the carpark to the start of the canyon. Throughout this time, I managed to gain a little insight into what canyoning actually was. Simple—you find a stream and follow it down. If you get to a waterfall, you either jump if it's small and the water below is deep enough, or you find an anchor and abseil down. Sounds exciting? Well, it sure is.

It was about midday when we got to the start of Grand Canyon. After strapping on our gear, it was now time for the real

adventure. The first section was just "testing the waters"—we waded through the ankle-to knee-deep stream. I saw my first yabby (it's an orangey red animal that looks like a lobster) sitting comfortably on a rock under the water. *Yikes! I really don't want to step on one of those.*

As I was the last in line, I was threading on cloudy water. I was little scared as I didn't know what was at the bottom of the river bed. Soon, the water became waist deep and boy, was it cold! After a couple of scrambles and water-thrashing, we arrived at a short abseil. Al and Lincoln went through a couple of basics and off we were on the first abseil.

The next abseil was the main one which descends about ten metres. It was a tad trickier. I had done lots of abseiling off trees as a kid, but nothing as cool as abseiling down a waterfall. The anchor was lower so it was quite difficult to get onto the abseil. Lincoln went down first to be the "safety" (he held the bottom of the rope in case we lost control), while Al helped us with clipping the gear onto the rope.



Govett's Leap from the lookout.



Eugenie in the Bungleboori Creek: 'I did it!'

As I sunk my weight onto the rope, which did take quite a bit of courage, water gushed through my oversized wetsuit. Brr!! Somehow, part of the rope got caught on the rock and the abseil was really jerky. Lincoln kept yelling words of encouragement and I was down in no time.

At the bottom, I had my first canyon swim to a nearby ledge. *Argh...it's bloody freezing!* Good thing there was a little sunlight on the ledge as I sat and waited for the others to come down. I tried taking a couple of photos, but my numb hands and the low light level in the canyon didn't help much.

After a while, I got used to the cold and we continued down the canyon while scrambling, swimming and admiring the pretty rock formations along the way. At the end of the canyon, we had our late lunch of muesli bars and bushwalked back out to the car park, passing more beautiful scenery along the way. We returned to the carpark near sunset and started the drive home, stopping by Govett's Leap Lookout on the way. Tired from the train ride and the day's adventure, I slept really well that night.

EARLY NEXT MORNING, we prepared for our next canyon, "Hole In The Wall". An hour later, we were on our way, not forgetting to stop at the bakery for Al's favourite sourdoughs and Lincoln's squashy-rhubarb cake.

It was a bumpy drive to the car-park. This time round, the trek to the start of the can-

yon was much longer and involved a fair bit of bush-bashing. 'This is what it's normally like finding a canyon,' Al said. Not a big fan of bush-bashing, particularly not in shorts, I couldn't wait for this section to be over.

Some two hours later, we finally reached the canyon's starting point. Getting into the cold water with those bush-bashing scratches wasn't exactly the nicest thing, but we soon warmed up. Round the first corner was the most beautiful sight I had ever seen. This canyon, labelled as one of the hidden gems of the Blue Mountains certainly deserved its name. Consisting of a stream flowing through a narrow canyon and sunlight streaming through on breathtaking rock formations covered in lichen and moss, I really can't find any more words to describe the amazing views we saw.


The highlight of this canyon had to be both the glow-worm cave and the thirteen metre free-hanging abseil. A couple of hand-over-hand abseils and swims brought us to this underground glow-worm lit cave. On a ledge with our torch lights turned off, we sat in awe of a fantastic display of glow-worms. It was like a clear, starry night of constellations surrounding us.

The last abseil of the canyon was a free-fall of thirteen metres. This time round, Al descended first while Lincoln stayed behind to check on us. Getting onto the abseil was easy, but then came the scary part—getting my feet off the wall and hanging mid-air! As

I pushed my feet off the wall, I closed my eyes for a split second afraid that I would slide down the rope. Nope, I wasn't going anywhere as long as I kept my right-hand gripped on the rope. Yes, I had overcome yet another fear! Just standing at the bottom of the abseil watching Eugenie and Lincoln descend with the sound of water splashing on a rock in the background was an experience in itself—you really appreciate wonders a rope can do and the work of nature that surrounds you.

The wade and swims out of the canyon through the Bungleboori Creek brought us through more beautiful scenery. As we laughed happily at the day's adventure through chattering teeth, I was a teeny bit disappointed that the adventure was nearing an end. I turned around and paused to admire the view surrounding me. I knew that I would be back again someday.

CANYONING IS AN amazing sport and given the chance, everyone should give it a go. As long as you're comfortable with water, learning rope skills isn't all that hard. Trust me, swimming in the cold water for the amazing views and heart-thumping adventure is really worth it all. 'You can only see that much standing from a lookout above the canyons, but getting into the canyons is a whole new experience in itself.'

Thanks Al and Lincoln for the amazing time canyoning in NSW! 

NED CARVES MT. NELSE

Five walkers eschew modern club culture to experience the ski season that never really happened, and to rest in snow. A lot.



Callum takes some time out, adopts the Kangaroo Stance and admires Steve's incredible rock-jumping antics.



The crew take a short breather on Heathy Spur as clouds descend in the early afternoon. Marina took on the navigation duties, seen here (second from left) in technical magnificence.

Callum: The jam sammies were already eaten, so was one double choc fudge muffin, yet he was f—ing hungry, trapped on a campus without food. That's a good opening sentence.

Steve: Okay, I'll use it.

Callum: Was I on this ski trip?

Steve: You were on this ski trip, Callum. There is photographic evidence to support this claim.

Callum: I don't remember a mountain.

Steve: This is the skiing trip on the only weekend of snow, with Marina and the Ned.

Su Li: As opposed to plodding our way up Mt. Feathertop at midnight, five souls slept the night at Bogong Village rotunda.

Steve: Yeah, we abandoned Felix and his Midnight Ascent. He even used my theme. That rotunda... I got the chance to determine whether sleeping on one of the tables was warmer than sleeping on the ground.

Callum: Is it a rotunda? Isn't that where bands play?

Steve: Yeah, that little shelter in Bogong Village. This is where you met the goose.

Su Li: Friendly, snarly goose.

Callum: A goose? I don't remember that. I remember going to the cafe to get coffee and getting them cheap because we put our own lids on. I've obviously blocked the goose out.

Su Li: 10c discount?

Callum: 50c.

Steve: Anyway, Callum made best friends with the goose, and then we went up to Falls Creek. There was a guy carrying a life-sized monkey puppet on his pack. We didn't see him as we headed up the trail to the dam.

Callum: Ned continued his dramatic rise in ski-touring.

Su Li: We headed to the storage pond via Nordic Bowl. We went off the ski trails and were onto cross-country terrain. Only a couple of falls to the lunch spot between Edmonson and Johnston Huts.

Steve: The snowball fight, Callum.

Su Li: Haha, the snowball fight which I was gladly out of.

Callum: Snowball fight? I've had so many...

Steve: This was personal, between you and me. I claimed victory, and you managed to hit Ned a few times for bonus collateral damage.

Su Li: Moving on...

Callum: You were just the cover, I was after Ned all along.

Steve: I'm glad we left the fishing rods behind, though I daresay we might be better at fishing than at skiing.

Su Li: Moving on... we got to the junction that leads to Edmonson Hut and had lunch with views of the Main Range [in New South Wales].

Callum: I fell over once.

Steve: You fell over a few times, Callum.

Su Li: I can't even remember if I fell or not.

Callum: All I remember is falling over.

Su Li: We decided to have some after lunch exercise—Marina headed up the trail to Mt. Nelse and we followed. Ned and Marina were enthusiastic enough to head out to Spion Kopje, while the three of us "rested" at the sign until Ned decided to head downhill. Callum, then I, followed.

Callum: Su Li always follows me.

Su Li: Yes, Callum's the hero. Steve was behind, then was nowhere to be seen.

Steve: Yeah, you guys all abandoned us.

Callum: I wouldn't say abandoned... "tried to lose" is maybe more appropriate.

Steve: Callum, Ned and Su Li had nicked off down the hill toward Edmonson Hut while Marina went to "visit the summit". I wondered where everyone went, and it turned out to be quite fortunate I didn't go visit Marina while she was "visiting the summit".

Su Li: By the time I realised Steve had disappeared, I was too far down the slope to head back up and so I continued falling down the steep powdery slope.

Steve: Marina and I left little signs in the snow and a trail of jellybeans to indicate we were going back to the packs, thinking that maybe you'd come back up the hill, but you guys continued down to the hut.

Su Li: Anyway, we went down to Edmonson Hut and had to climb back up to the packs at the junction.

Steve: Marina and I ended up finding our way back down to the junction and I stacked on those skeleton trees that poked through the wafer-thin layers of snow. Hang on, this is where Callum and I kept falling over on the way up.

Callum: Hey, falling? Come on...

Steve: I saw you, dude.

Callum: Resting, Steve, resting.

Steve: Oh yeah. We both rested heaps.

Su Li: Resting? Ned and Marina had a friendly race down that same hill. Ned tripped on some log, blamed it on the thin snow cover.

Steve: I was way behind as usual, if that happened.

Callum: I think I was last.

Su Li: You were at the bottom, Callum. We were "resting" while Ned went up to find the lost ones.

Steve: Marina and I were already decided on coming back down by that stage. I had a massive blue with the little skeleton trees. I was so mad.

Callum: So were they.

Steve: Still, I came out on top. We made it about halfway down before most people decided to just ditch the skis and turn to the old-reliable feet. I know that Callum and I decided that walking was going to be more expedient than skiing.

Callum: I only did it to make you feel better. I was doing quite well and had only fallen over once.

Steve: Once? Every time I was on the



A generic afternoon view of some snow, rock and assorted hills in the distance (above) while Ned enjoys the serenity, skiing the slopes of Mt. Nelse (main).

ground and looked for you, you were on the ground too.

Callum: Resting, Steve, I'm not as fit as I used to be.

Steve: I didn't say you had fallen.

Callum: Insinuated.

Su Li: Marina did well and made it all the way with skis.

Steve: We made a snow platform for our Olympus [an expensive snow tent]. You got to show off your Kiwi-ness for us.

Callum: Why? I ran off into a burrow, ate worms, and laid an egg half the size of my body?

Steve: You had the shovel and Su Li and I had to keep stamping on snow, much to your amusement, to flatten the platform.

Callum: I had to carry that damn thing. You're both very good stampers.

Steve: We take pride in our work. But, there were randoms with us: do you remember Jenny and Jenny?

Su Li: They're ex-MUMCers. Paddlers, and still keen to play canoe polo for the Club.

Steve: They were surprised to find us here, and even more surprised to see me wearing Tevas [sports sandals]. Did I have Tevas on this trip? I think I did.

Callum: Maybe that's why you couldn't ski.

Su Li: The Jennies sort of remembered Tom Kneen, who was just before their time.

Callum: Three of us were jammed in a tent and Su Li tried the old hit-on-a-guy-while-jammed-in-a-tent trick.

Steve: I don't remember this.

Su Li: I don't either, but Callum slept the other way around.

Steve: He has a foot fetish. Right, so the next day we packed up our crap and headed up the hill toward the junction again.

Su Li: No. We woke up to sounds of Ned and Marina zooming around energetically outside our tent.

Steve: Did they tell us to hurry up this time?

Su Li: No—we took our time getting ready in the sun, then plodded our way up to the junction, where we dumped our packs to play on the slopes of Nelse...

Steve: ...where Callum rested a lot more, and so did I.

Su Li: Ditto.

Callum: I don't remember this.

Su Li: We tried to find the best way up and down the icy slopes. The two Jennies came up too and showed us how it was done.

Steve: I can't remember seeing this. That might be because I rested my face in the snow a lot.

Su Li: While we were snowploughing and attempting to parallel turn, they were tele-marking.

Steve: I was trying to stay upright.

Su Li: And you tried to jump into a rock.

Steve: I tried to jump *off* a rock, not *into* one...which I could have done easily.

Su Li: We skied around until dark clouds started to roll in and the bosses decided we'd return to the cars via Heathy Spur. Fog caused visibility to deteriorate as we tried to stay close while we stumbled our way down. Near the end, we decided to bash our way down to the groomed trails. I face planted.

Steve: So did I, numerous times. Callum and I had many, many rests on the way down, for some reason.

Su Li: I think Marina did too. I was the last, as in the furthest up. It was at a ridiculously steep and rocky part. Nevertheless we all survived, and had lunch by the storage pond at this picnic table.

Steve: We skied back to the causeway, walked over it, then skied back to the Bowl. We skied slowly, despite our attempts to speed up.

Callum: I don't remember this at all.

Su Li: We'd like to think that we'd improved by then, the skis had lots of grip on the snow and the slopes weren't steep enough to accumulate speed. By the time we got to the end of the trail, snow had turned to slush.

Steve: Nah, I hadn't improved in the slightest. I was just luckier. **M**



Callum and Su Li take a break on the sign at the junction (left) to Edmonson and Johnston Huts. In an exciting sequence, Steve demonstrates an unprecedented level of ineptitude, hurtling over rock to rest on a pillow of snow (right).





Marina, Su Li and Callum hooning around on the slopes below Mt. Nelse, but above Johnston Hut. Callum and Steve rested many times going down this area, for no apparent reason at all.



Ned and Callum on Heathy Spur, just as the afternoon weather turned sour and the clouds started rolling in fast. It was very reminiscent of Steve's first tour with the Club in 2004, when his group experienced similar weather changes.

PHOTOS: STEVE CHAN



MIDNIGHT ASCENT

BY FELIX DANCE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY OLIVER CLARKE AND SARAH NEUMANN

BY NOW YOU will probably already know whether or not the beloved MUMC Hut on Mount Feathertop has survived the ravages of this year's bushfire season, as there are at the time of writing fires on the mountain as well as the Ovens Valley below it. This means that you'll have a better idea than me on the significance of this latest, and perhaps last, Midnight Ascent.

HEADING OFF FOR the weekend of Friday August 4th, the trip began later at night than usual, with groups leaving at widely dispersed times from the clubrooms after 6ish. Two groups were held back by some time due to David Blundy getting a bike-

puncture and Tom Anderson's tram hitting a car on the way to the clubrooms. However, before we knew it, we were rocketing down the Hume and downing deep-fried Mars Bars in Seymour.

Feeling sick, we arrived at the trout farm for the long walk to the start of the North West Spur. It was at this point that it was noticed the almost total lack of bushwalking people on the trip (*see* Ned Carves Mt. Nelse—*Ed*) with the remaining twenty or so Ascenters comprised mostly of climbers and paddlers, the good weather preventing them from last year's exodus to the rivers as rain bucketed on the rest of us.

After a long slog through the valley after midnight, we finally reached the start of the uphill bit. From the bottom we could see an array of multicoloured lights blinking on and off up the spur. On the way up it didn't take long for everyone to divide into a fast

group, who we didn't see until sunrise, and a slow group, who all seemed to accumulate halfway up the 1200m-high spur at a tree branch which had fallen across the path. Coupled with the rising snow depths, this had completely obscured the path.

Having conquered that challenge, more uphill stuff was to follow, with excellent views of the stars giving way to Venus rising in the east and the beginning of the hazy glow of the sun. After a constant stream of 'are we there yet?', we reached the hut just as the sun popped over the snow-covered Fainters, and some of us celebrated by drinking Tim Wallace's cold beer while we watched others frantically erect the walls of the toilet in a sleep-deprived frenzy.

Finally, we hit the hay in the luxuriously spacious and altogether wondrous MUMC Hut, adoringly built in the shape of a geodesic buckminsterfullerene. More people



A group of people near the summit of Mt. Feathertop on Saturday afternoon. This is a popular side-trip during Midnight Ascent, though it is important to watch out for cornices near the summit.



The signature geometry of the MUMC Hut at 1200m on North West Spur. In the main image (opposite), the hut is just visible as a small structure on the right-hand side at the end of the spur. The December 2006/January 2007 fires came into close proximity, but the Hut still continues to elude the flames.

Jen sits next to the snow sauna—seen as a black silhouette in the bottom left corner—a prominent feature on Midnight Ascents that occasionally appears alongside igloos (left).



A customary group photo of the participants in full thematic and formal regalia. Roma invicta!

PHOTOS: OLIVER CLARKE (OPPOSITE, TOP MIDDLE); SARAH NEUMANN (BOTTOM)

arrived after dawn on this Midnight Ascent than on any other in living memory.

The rest of Saturday morning was spent in sloth-like inactivity, with some brief stirrings beginning for the mandatory summiting expedition during the afternoon. The weather was eerily calm and sunny with snow covering most of the mountain.

After some fine views and photos from the top most of us relaxed to enjoy others showing off their telemarking skills skiing down the west face. This inspired many of us to attempt similar stunts using our shoes and arses, with varying degrees of success.

The snow-filled frivolities of the day gave way to the gastronomical excesses of the evening, all clothed in various shades of the theme *The Glory of Rome vs. The Barbarian Horde*. Unlike many previous themes for Midnight Ascent, this one was very well observed, with many donning togas, swords,

horned helmets and Flintstones outfits. The most impressive costume was Tim Wallace's gladiatorial gear, complete with recent cuts and scratches from climbing backwards through the chimney hole in the centre of the hut.

After too many freezing photos of a barbarian majority beating the crap out of Romans, the cooking commenced.

For this, the lot of us were divided into groups of roughly six, with pairs working on entrée, mains and dessert simultaneously, each cooking something never before seen at the hut.

A Weber barbeque brought up on a previous Midnight Ascent (*carried by Jim Anderson's group in 2004—Ed*) was used by some groups for maximum effect. To future Midnight Ascent groups: making capsicum sauce using capsicums and forks is like Chinese water torture.

After dinner things are a bit of a blur, but I can recall the construction of a sauna in the snow, games of "I've Never" and general passing-out and being embarrassing.

The next morning was dominated by cleaning up and the appropriation of lost items (got myself some more toothpaste).

Another lot attempted and succeeded reaching the summit, finding that the snow had melted a lot. I got reception for the first time on the trip, allowing me to warn the Milawa pub of the coming plague of hikers. Unfortunately, they were out of Hellfire Ale on tap, something many of us were looking forward to after the fairly uneventful and lazy downhill slog.

Despite the statistically greater chance of death driving home from a bushwalk than on the walk itself, we all managed to get back alive and well after a highly successful, and hopefully not final, Midnight Ascent. **M**

View of Hugh Gorge Junction at the valley end, from Razorback Ridge (main) with a self-portrait of Sam and James (inset).

LARAPINTA TRAIL

BY SAM FLEWETT AND JAMES SOUTHWELL

WE MET AT Franklin Street coach terminal on a dark and drizzly Friday night in Melbourne for what was to become the start of a journey back in time to one of the oldest landscapes on earth, the red centre of Australia.

During the trip we planned to traverse a series of ranges that runs east-west through some of the more mountainous regions outside of Alice Springs, situated in the West McDonald National Park.

Set amongst a semi-arid environment, the Park experiences climate extremes ranging from hot and humid days up to 45°C in midsummer to temperatures below -5°C during the chilly evenings of winter. Success in travelling through such an environment requires choosing an appropriate time of year for travelling and proper preparation to ensure one was equipped for the conditions.

One of the great walks of Australia, the Larapinta Trail was officially opened in April 2002 and has since become a jewel of central Australia, attracting many visitors from all over the country and beyond. The trail in its entirety covers an end-to-end distance of 223km, from Alice Springs to Mt. Sonder and requires around fourteen days to complete.

For the time-limited or those pursuing a more relaxing trip, the walk can be broken into sections.

For us, our twelve day walk was to start at Glen Helen situated by the Finke River and finish at Alice Springs, Australia's most inland town.

We arrived in Adelaide after an overnight bus ride from Melbourne and joined a Qantas flight to Alice Springs on the same morning. Heading north at an altitude of over 28,000 feet above sea level, the clouds cleared and we got views of the expanse of plains and salt lakes below. Further ahead the ranges glowed a brilliant red under the intense sun.

Touching down in Alice, it was only 13°C at midday, perfect weather for walking. The day was spent organizing food for the trip at the local Coles and visiting the not-so-mighty Todd River that sidles around the town; it was bone dry. There had been absolutely no rain in the region for the past six weeks. The night was spent at the lively backpackers' enjoying the vibe and the bargain \$5 meals in good company with some mathematically-minded people; there was a conference in town.

Stepping Back in Time

THE NEXT DAY we were on the bus again; however, this time we were fortunate to have a local driver who was also an experienced walking guide who gave us insight into the local area and some valuable information on the trail conditions. The weather was clear and the views forever.

The road meandered along the flats between two distinct ridgelines, one of which we would be traversing back to Alice. We arrived at a small community called Glen Helen Resort and unloaded our gear. It was getting close to noon and we had enough time to have a look at Glen Helen Gorge before starting the walk.

We started the walk heading north to the Larapinta trail and from there a short trek to Ormiston Gorge. This was an amazing experience as we walked along the Finke River, known as the oldest river in the world, that was flowing ever so slightly. The Finke only ever runs its full length three or four times in a century at times of extreme flood. Lining the banks were ancient formations of tilted rock emanating a red glow under the glaring sun and rich blue skies.

The walk to Ormiston was straightforward, following the undulating terrain and crossing numerous dry sandy creek beds. Accessible by road, Ormiston has basic facilities and some fine walking tracks to explore the area. The sun was descending and we had enough time to explore the gorge proper. We were fortunate to spot a rock wallaby and its joey drinking by the creek.

With the failing light casting vibrant colours on the high walls, we decided to climb the gorge by track and return to the campsite along the ridge top, obtaining glimpses of Ormiston Pound just east of the gorge. Back at the camp we cooked a fine meal under the star struck skies and spotted a dingo prowling the area.

The Dry Hot Interior

THE SECTION WE planned to walk today was between water sources that would take two days to cover. Given that we were intending to consume between three and five litres of water a day meant carrying six to ten litres of water each—yikes!

It was pretty clear from the start that the day was not going to be easy. It was not even 10AM when we reached the base of the day's main climb and we were already feeling the effects from the strong sun. It looked like the temperature would reach the high twenties or possibly low thirties. For the next four hours we would be climbing and following an exposed ridge under a cloudless sky with no wind...this was not part of the grand plan!

Sam, used to the mild conditions of New Zealand, definitely felt the heat and we took a number of opportunities to stop in what little shade was offered by the sparse vegetation and enjoy the amazing views into the valley below.

At the top of the ridge our efforts were rewarded with views west to Mt. Sonder and north to Mt. Giles. They were truly impressive and gave a lasting impression of the vastness of the land and the distance we already covered. A lunch stop under the shade of a lonely set of trees was bliss.

The following section followed the long exposed ridge—a seemingly easy task but we were thwarted by the arid rocky landscape that gave life to some of the hardiest plants I have ever seen. Even in July flowers were blooming and the mosaic of bright colours was contrasted the flat colours of the earth. We had now reached the end of the ridge at a spur offering views far east: an ideal campsite but the sun was too strong to make an extended stay enjoyable. We dropped down from the ridge to the coolness of the valley below with sheer delight and followed the valley to the alternate camp at Waterfall Gully.

The day was not yet over: with a troubled fuel stove we resorted to more traditional methods of cooking, collecting wood to start a fire before night fell upon us.

Quartzite Ridge Walking

AFTER YESTERDAY'S EVENTS an early start was a high priority to race the rising sun. This was also the plan of another group of twelve walkers who were travelling in the opposite direction. The path ahead was pleasant walking along a wide valley that was still sheltered from the sun and fanned by a cool headwind. Making good progress, we crossed over a pass and into the beating sun. It was not too far before we detoured towards the shaded walls of the Ochre pits.

The chasm was a mini-oasis, home to a number of palms set against glowing red walls. Passing through the chasm involved

some scrambling and on the other side it linked to a trail heading towards the sheltered camp based near Serpentine Chalet Dam. We reached camp by lunch and were relieved to have access to fresh water. The afternoon was spent chilling out under the shade of the gums and exploring the remnants of the old dam that once supplied water to the unsuccessful Serpentine Chalet. We also had a visit from an Australian Geographic film crew doing a feature on the Larapinta. (*An article was published in the Jan-Mar 2007 issue—Ed*).

The following day we planned to walk to Serpentine Gorge via a long traverse of a quartzite ridgeline. Again we had a fine day with a cool wind blowing which was a relief from the heat we experienced yesterday. The trail meandered along the base of the valley before meeting up with a ridgeline that made way for a gradual but sustained climb to the top. The views were tremendous and we took a number of photos from Counts Lookout sighting the main peaks of the area looming in the distance—Mounts Giles, Sonder and Zeil.

With plenty of time on hand we decided to continue for several kilometres to the end of the ridge for an extended lunch by a steep drop-off, with unobstructed views of the immense rock-strewn valley below.

We descended down the switchbacks to the valley below and on to Serpentine Gorge. Finding the campsite and with daylight to spare we were off to the gorge and a lookout situated above it, with some amazing views of the steep walls. We met a group at the road end to the gorge who advised us that rain was forecast for Alice Springs tomorrow. As night was falling, we watched clouds rapidly forming from the northeast that, for the first time on this trip, shadowed the glinting sky of stars.

Storm In Serpentine

WE WERE AWOKEN by light, not from the typical orange and red day glows of the ranges during sunrise but by the white light of lightning from the southwest. The thunder echoed loudly off the walls of the gorge. The intensity of the storm was getting higher, and was en route to Serpentine. The first drop of rain was the first call to shift our gear into the shelter where we took refuge. It was still early morning so we tried to reclaim our sleep in the shelter. The storm was approaching, lightning now striking above us. The rain intensified and battered loudly on the shelter's tin roof. Outside, the landscape changed from a dry, semi-arid to something akin to southwest Tasmania.

At this point in time Sam was glad to have brought his Gore-Tex jacket and I was glad to have brought a tent fly—items we considered omitting. The storm passed and we had breakfast in the shelter, waiting for the rain to clear. This didn't happen and we

left the shelter for Ellery creek in light rain and grey skies.

The next section of the track was a new challenge with the trail avoiding contouring any valley, instead following every minor ridge. The track scrambled up and down exposed terrain consisting of sharp weathered volcanic rock now soaked by rain. The rain and wind intensified and for some amazing reason the rock retained its grip even when wet, a fortune that perhaps saved us from injury. The rain eased and stopped, the sun shone briefly and then it rained again: were we back in Melbourne?

It was now noon and we arrived at Ellery Creek where we stopped under a shelter for lunch. A group of eight walkers shortly joined us for lunch, some embarking on a journey to Mt. Sonder.

With lunch over, our next stop was Rocky Gully that involved travelling 16km crossing an expansive plain before dark. The plains were like a highway and we covered ground at a great rate, leaving the Heavitree Range behind us and headed towards the Chewings Range ahead in the distance.

The showers were now intermittent and we arrived at the campsite before dark. We set up the shelter and sure enough, it started to rain yet again. Within an hour the rain had passed but the ground was saturated. We decided against battling to get a fire started to cook a meal in the dark with our stove in need of repair. There'd be no gourmet meals tonight!

After the long day yesterday we took it easy with a late start to Hugh Gorge. Hugh Gorge was our gateway to the Chewings Range, an impressive mountain range judged by the contours of our map. The walk would be a short one covering just 16km, a relief for our feet after the last few long days of walking. Travelling along the plains was easy and we soon found ourselves at a picturesque camp by a flowing creek and white gums. We had time to explore the area and collect some wood for a fire that night. The gum leaves that were once great kindling were of little use wet; appropriate use of shellite made for a rather entertaining way to start a fire.

Whilst cooking dinner a couple arrived from the other direction looking rather wet and weathered. The river ahead had risen significantly and meant we now had some waterholes to contend with! The skies started to clear and we slept under the ghost gums and a clear sky full of stars.

Into The High Country

DURING THE NIGHT we were awoken by...rain! Not again! The fly was put up quickly to keep our sleeping gear dry. We couldn't believe our luck—or lack thereof. The rain became heavier and we tried to reclaim our sleep. Soon enough it was light, the rain had eased and eventually stopped as

we packed and got ready to walk to Birthday Waterhole, ensuring that any valuables were safe from being submerged during the travels ahead.

The walk through Hugh Gorge was amazing and fortunately the creek had gone down from the previous day. Walking through the creeks was a relief for the feet and we spent over an hour negotiating the gorge with brilliant walls high above us. There was only one section we encountered with chest deep water crossing a waterhole. It was a cool day and unfortunately we had to keep moving to stay warm whilst wet.

Our next checkpoint—Hugh Junction—signaled that it was time to leave the gorge and head for high ground leaving the towering red walls behind us. We followed a sustained gradual climb up and over a wind swept rocky saddle following a descent down a creek system before a steep climb, switch-backing up several hundred meters to an impressive razorback ridge. The views up high were wonderful, overlooking the path traveled in the morning. We could identify Hugh Gorge and other neighboring gorges to the north. Protected on the lee side of the hill during the climb, the tops exposed us to incredibly strong winds funneled up the network of valleys, at times gusting over 30 knots. We were on edge trying to stay balanced in the wind, sometimes pausing between the cycles of gusts as we negotiated sections of the trail that passed a number of precipitous drops that led down to the valley below.

Once on the ridgetop we had fantastic walking with views on either side and crossed Windy Saddle which certainly lived up to its name that day. The ridge soon ended and we dropped down through the sheltered Rocky Talus and to the start of Spencer Gorge with its magnificent palms, large boulders and impressive walls. After hurdling over fallen trees, bouldering across a short section of the gorge wall and some rock hopping, we were through the gauntlet and onto the open sands of Birthday Waterhole, our campsite for the night. Boots off, it was great walking on the sands by the waterhole, a time to chill out under the ghost gums, explore the area, collect water and set up a fire for the night.

After three days of rain and overcast weather the skies were due to clear, however once again we were greeted with grey. Were we really in central Australia?

Today we planned to climb the highest point of our walk—Brinkley Bluff at 1209 metres. The sight of a rain front closing in on the peak ahead did far from put a smile on your average walker. We followed the valley past Mint Bush spring and over Stuarts Pass with views of Brinkley Bluff, the summit occasionally becoming lost in the passing cloud swirling the tops. Stopping for a quick break we fuelled up for the climb ahead. The wind was brisk but not as strong as on earlier days and we climbed

metre by metre, occasionally stopping for a breather and to savor the views around us.

The weather was actually improving as we climbed and by the time we reached the summit we managed to get good views in all directions! What a relief, Larapinta was kind to us once again! A group we had met earlier had walked this section in poor weather and managed to tag the summit cairn in whiteout conditions before having to descend to safer ground. Joyful, we sheltered from the wind behind the summit cairn, filled in the logbook and enjoyed the amazing views. From the summit it was a fast and fun descent down a rocky ridge with Standley Chasm visible in the distance. At times we had almost reached a jogging pace—hell yeah!

In no time we were at the scenic Reveal Saddle and stopped for lunch knowing we were on the last leg to Standley Chasm. It was now a final downhill dash along a fast graded trail following a valley to meet the road leading to Standley.

Standley, a local tourist destination, was a nice stop after days of traveling through wilderness and we were able to collect our food drop that we delivered prior to the walk. The weather turned fine with blue skies and we relaxed in shade, talking with another group of walkers who were also

doing the Larapinta, sharing trail info and talking about other walking adventures. We camped the night at Standley Hilton, a five star campsite with a grassed picnic area to set up tents, flush toilets and fireplaces with wood supplied. With our replenished supplies we cooked up a feast celebrated with a bottle of wine.

It was a brisk overcast morning as we packed camp early to explore the famous Standley Chasm. It was also an opportunity to find the peep hole, a squeeze that forms an alternative route out of the Chasm to rejoin the Larapinta Trail.

After some rock hopping, climbing an awkward carved tree trunk and scrambling a number of boulders we managed to find the peep hole.

A manageable squeeze for the average person to get through, the Hole was too small for our bulbous packs and we decided to turn around and return through the chasm to rejoin the trail up and out of Standley Chasm. The climb out followed hundreds of intricately carved sandstone steps that were apparently made by a renowned Tasmanian stonemason.

Up high it started to drizzle and the flanks of the local peaks were shrouded by cloud. A decision was made to take the less-scenic low route and stay in the acacia-lined val-



Mt. Sonder in the distance as seen from Counts Lookout (inset) with a view of Quartzite Ridge (main).

ley. We made surprisingly good time and arrived at Fish Hole, a landmark featuring a number of small waterholes. We followed Jay Creek upstream to arrive at a campsite for lunch and filled our water bottles from the supply tanks. Then, a 10km dash along undulating terrain to get to Mulga Camp before dark to prepare a fire for tea.

On arrival we met a group of four elderly women keeping warm by a blazing fire at sundown. We chatted briefly, pitched tent and got dinner cooking on the ashes. Talking around the fire we discovered that the ladies were planning on slowly doing the Larapinta over seventeen days and that they had to reschedule their walk after a member of their group broke a limb only a couple of days in the walk. After dropping their friend at the hospital, the group of four proceeded to walk back to where they had left the trail from Alice Springs!

It was also noted that although their stay in the outback was in excess of ours they managed to travel considerably lighter and with less bulk, taking prepared dehydrated meals that also required less fuel to cook. Inspirational! The sky restrained shedding any more moisture as we shared stories into the night.

Alice From Wonderland

WAKING UP TO overcast skies and drizzle we lazily slept in as the group of keen women had already gotten up, cooked breakfast and headed off for their planned walk today of only around 10km. The rain eventually stopped and we packed and headed on to Simpson Gap along straightforward trails.

We enjoyed lunch under a shelter and met up with a couple from Adelaide who were on the first leg of a major holiday after retiring from work. An offer of fresh fruit and veggies couldn't possibly be turned down!

We explored the gap and its towering walls and sighted a rock wallaby almost unrecognizable amongst the rock fall. It was then onto our camp for the night at Wallaby Gap, involving climbing up to a ridge that gave our first views of the distant ranges leading to the gap at Alice Springs.

Feet tired, we arrived at camp watching an amazing foray of colours unfold, highlighted by the scattered cloud out west. For the first time we slept with the faint sounds of vehicular traffic echoing from Alice.

It was our final day of walking today and we had breakfast and packed up camp at a

leisurely pace. Setting off with clear skies we started the gradual climb up Euro Ridge that gave way to views of Alice Springs from its steep slopes to the south. We were not far off now.

After crossing a section of rolling terrain we met with the Adelaide to Darwin railway and spotted a number of kangaroos on the local hills. Following a watercourse, we walked under a bridge that formed part of the Stuart Highway and continued through a landscape strewn with boulders and low scrub to a minor service road leading to the historic Telegraph Station.

This was the end of the Larapinta and we made a final log book entry. It was now only a five kilometre walk along the famous Todd River to meet up with the township of Alice Springs. It was a delight to see small sections of water flowing down the Todd, two weeks ago dry and lifeless. Eagles soared high searching for food buoyant on the updrafts of the nearby slopes.

Soon enough we hit the edge of the township and checked in at the backpackers', the walk was now over. **M**

PHOTOS: JAMES SOUTHWELL



Ghost gums at Ellery Creek after a storm. This slide was runner-up at the 2006 Pie And Slide Night.



SUMMER DAY VALLEY

Cold porridge sandwiches with tomato sauce...?

BY SIMON MCKENZIE

WE ARRIVED AT Stapylton campground and set up our tents by the light of the full moon. It all seemed so peaceful...

Woken up the next morning at 5:30AM by the raucous squawks of cockatoos and the school group we'd managed to plant ourselves right next to, it didn't quite feel like the peaceful weekend away from the city that we'd been anticipating.

While discussing what we should do with the batch of expertly made burnt porridge, I was hurt by everyone else's disgust at my Dad's school lunch specialty—cold porridge sandwiches with tomato sauce. Hey, don't knock it until you've tried it.

Over at the cliff, we set up top-ropes on the very popular back wall, where Glenn and Ollie each ticked *Tootsie Direct* at grade

22, as Claire and Kate climbed *Regatta* (12). Ollie and I then led the two routes on Calcutti Crag, seconded by Tom and Rhonda, while Michelle and Dave each led *Waxman* on the main wall.

Lazing around at the bottom of the climbs, Ollie kept things lively by falling three metres out of the tree he'd been lying in and dropping down a hole, adding "don't lie in trees" to his other two lessons of the day, being "don't boulder in thongs" and "don't sit on Rhonda's lunch".

SUNDAY STARTED WITH a game of tent football. That's where the school group nearby decides to play football in the middle of your tents while you sleep. We gritted our teeth and waited until they left, then bitched about it over burnt scrambled eggs. We seem to be getting better at these burnt meals—I can do it almost every time now!

The morning's climbing was broken by a quick lunch (1:30PM–4PM) after which we felt rested up enough to really start to get serious about this climbing thing...

'That was amazing, incredible! Look at the view!' Topping out on his first lead, Tom was beside himself.

'That's nice, Tom. It might be a good idea if you jump around a little further from the edge of the cliff...'

This was a great weekend with a great group. Thanks to everyone for coming, and thanks particularly to Glenn for running the trip.

THE WEEKEND'S CLIMBS: *Tootsie* (19), *Tootsie Direct* (22), *Tom Cobbey's Climb* (16), *Regatta* (12), *Left Route* (14), *Right Route* (15), *Waxman* (11), *Doves* (14), *Greenfingers* (15), *Blue Band* (10), *Danger Bird* (15), *Mossy* (8), *Eat More Parsley* (7), *Any Day Now* (7). **M**



Rhonda climbs on *Left Route* (14), Calcutti Crag; Tom and Glenn sit. There are only two significant climbs on Calcutti Crag—*Left Route* and unsurprisingly, *Right Route* (15).

Ollie, Dave and Michelle on *Waxman* (11), considered a classic climb with substantial holds (opposite).



Simon belaying Michelle on *Tootsie*. Tom is in the foreground.



LITTLE DESERT TREEPLANTING

STEVE CHAN

BRONWYN'S CONSERVATION TRIPS seem to have this knack of being unusual. Everything had a distinct flavour of fantasy in late August when I was reminded by none other than Bronwyn that I had signed up for this trip in March and had since forgotten completely.

The trip description consisted of the following adventure-inspiring statements: treeplanting in the Little Desert near the Grampians; bus transport provided; food provided; Saturday evening entertainment provided; most importantly, alcohol provided (rare!). I hadn't planted a tree with a hangover before and the concept of hammering in stakes and flora whilst zonked seemed like a dangerous prospect.

AS I WAITED PATIENTLY at Southern Cross Station (how uncharacteristically punctual!) our crew appeared out of nowhere and we discovered Matthew Adams couldn't go. I had mixed feelings about this: on one hand, we would all be deprived of Matthew's humour and company; on the other hand, it left me undisputed harem leader. Rawwr! We lurched onto the bus with various entertaining artifacts in tow.

I found that I had been registered for the trip sans surname, destined to be known only as Steve, which later created perplexity for the treeplanting administration.

During a brief dinner stop at McDonalds (urk) we amused ourselves with their new

device called a *sippah*—a straw—and tried to identify animals in the animal-shaped pasta. We conversed near the toilets night-club-style: joined by others not from the Club, we felt a little less seedy than normal. Continuing into the night, we passed through a motorised fence. We were now officially trapped in the Little Desert Nature Lodge where we set stuff up.

As dawn broke, I woke to a speaker tower, from which a voice murmured encouragement and miscellaneous esoteric phrases. I felt like a superhero after waking everyone up for breakfast, during which I consumed the most orange juice ever.

Before departure to our first planting site we rushed to get all our crap together at the last minute which was normal club procedure, and acquired compulsory nametags and a showbag full of goodies. Each bag was somehow utterly unique in its contents.

As a result of Chinese Whispers email, Catherine Hill was officially known as Catherine Lobe—originally a nickname—for the rest of the weekend, accompanying me in mutual surname indignity.

Arriving at the planting-site shortly thereafter, we were greeted by a wide expanse of flat open field, all prepared for our fanatic fit of planting. Shallow trenches had already been carved into the soil. According to popular opinion this was known as the rip line (a line of machine-dug soil, intended to ease planting) but later, doubts would surface and tensions would rise.

We observed a how-to introduction to the various tools and techniques involved in

treeplanting. This was clearly not like school camps where you'd grab a hammer, belt everything into the ground, then staple-gun plastic sheets to stakes. This setup was quite elegant. There was a variety of plants which we were to...plant, and I'm sure there was a very adequate description of each. One of the trees was spiky.

Tree-shields were made out of pre-cut milk containers (usually skim milk ones) and a pair of bamboo sticks impaled through them, forming an X. There were also devices which easily (for the most part) created holes in the ground into which you dropped plants. Such devices were known as *pottyputki*s; unfortunately, due to collective immaturity everything degenerated rapidly. After a series of evolutions the pottyputki's were renamed *poo-plungers*.

The demonstration ended with a basic first-aid rundown, suggesting we 'don't get injured, but if you do, there's a first-aid kit here. Be careful where you walk, don't fall over.' It all seemed pretty standard fare and went through both ears twice. Five minutes after the briefing ended, I impaled a finger on a bit of stick as I attempted to make a shield, thus becoming the first and only casualty of the day.

After plunging and planting our way across the field we had a quick break for morning tea on top of what was called "The Hill" by the organisers. I looked for one over the distant horizon and saw none, but later it occurred to me what they meant and I prepared myself for a gruelling two metre ascent into the distance.

Guide To Planting Trees With The Plunger



Jab it into the ground like a spear. This type of plunger is an advanced model and requires operating a lever that opens a pair of jaws, forming the perfect plant-shaped hole.



When the plunger is embedded in the ground, you load it up with a plant, like a mortar. Operating the lever action puts the plant in the hole in the ground.



Remove the plunger and bury your plant like pirate treasure. Add a touch of water because plants like that sort of thing.



Now place a shield around it, so it doesn't get kidnapped or eaten. Repeat until you are exhausted.

To my surprise there was a massive fire going, with various forms of fodder for us to consume. I examined unfamiliar devices arrayed around the fire—they were made of metal, looked a little like beer kegs and had clearly been sitting there for some time. You poured in cold water at the top, and boiling water came out the bottom. I still have no idea what they are called.

Morning tea made our group a little lethargic and we all sat down. As we discussed increasingly important matters of state (including Catherine's striking resemblance to Captain Planet's Linka, and the inexplicable appearance of a workman's crane on The Hill) we built stacks and stacks of shields. Others seemed intrigued by our energy-efficient approach to treeplanting and soon formed their own cells of shieldmakers, whose output was collected in buckets, whisked away by shieldbearers to a far off group of planters.

This continued for a while.

Time ticked on and so did lunch. There was a group photo and then another. I attempted to look heroic, wielding a plunger like a long-forgotten hero of old. The second group photo involved having everyone lie down in such a way that our prone, battle-weary bodies spelled "Hindmarsh". Then there was a sudden exclamation from Michelle: 'The ants! They are taking my groin!', and anonymously from a random boy: 'I feel sorry for all the old ladies. They don't stand a chance.'

Intriguingly, there was a small area of the field shunned by nearly every group this

day. Prompt investigation of Mystery Area followed, revealing horribly dry soil that was extremely difficult to plant in despite the deployment of several plungers. We borrowed a sturdy-looking metal trowel, thinking that getting up close would somehow ease our task. Our conclusion was poor. The trowel bent. Afraid we'd break it, we returned it. We talked to a local with a bling camera and cool sunglasses for a little while, and then prepared to depart.

It was now late afternoon and time for a siesta, but we opted for a quick game of hackysack. In the absense of a hackey, we used a glove, resulting in a few rounds of *handysack* and introduced another random planter to the art of uncoordination.

Tonight was the promised free-alcohol night. Here we are in the Little Desert in the middle of nowhere, and there's a cool spartan pub with subsidised alcohol. I went up to ask for a beer...and was asked for ID? Some might understand the baffled expression I wore.

After some negotiating that would make Kofi Annan envious, I got my drink and subsequent ones too. We danced like hooligans (some more than others...) and attracted some attention. Kathryn's encounter was the creepiest by far: some guy insisted it was of prime importance that Kathryn knew there was "straw on her butt". We wobbled back to our tents after hooning around.

SOMEWHAT NOT-HUNGOVER I awoke again to the basso murmurings of Speaker Tower: *arise, ariiise!* The usual routine followed and

we were off to the final planting site where it felt like planting in a quarry, similar to Mystery Area. Nevertheless, we proceeded as planned with the sun beating down on our backs as we mined the soil with pick axes. There was a brief flurry of opinion as to what and where the rip line was, since the site leader seemed a little unsure himself. Tensions rose. Eventually we democratically agreed to plant wherever it was actually possible.

Our designated stop time of 12PM came and went, but we were happy to labour on for a little while more. One lady wasn't so pleased, however: 'We were scheduled to stop at 12PM, it is now 12:15PM; we are a volunteer group and we must get back to Melbourne.' Another lady observed, 'She is scary!' We spoke to Bling Camera Man some more and then piled onto the bus.

As we returned to the Nature Lodge, we had a quick lunch, during which I pocketed a roll. As usual, we were the first to eat and last to pack up for an utterly uneventful ride back to Melbourne except for the inevitable nightclub-esque toilet traffic.

EVEN AFTER RETURNING, my horticultural experience didn't end. Three days later, I peered into my pack to find my own little conservation site—in the form of a decaying forgotten sandwich. With mayonnaise.

In late November 2006, a bushfire in the Little Desert claimed 10,000 hectares of land. On New Year's Eve, another fire in the area claimed over 7000 additional hectares, portents of the summer fires to come. **M**

PADDLING

A BEGINNER'S PERSPECTIVE

On the Mitta Mitta a beginner conquers the fear of paddling and maybe Evil Timmy as well.



A cluster of various people on the Goulburn River near a rock, with kayakers, paddles and buoyancy vests.



Grace paddling on the Goulburn.

BY GRACE PHANG

CATHEDRALS 2005 WAS MY first time paddling. I was given one of the long boats—the *Cross Dresser* to be exact. If I remember correctly, Mac taught me how to do my first wet exit. I kept on pulling on the tag even before I was flipped over and had to repeat the procedure a couple of times. The water was freezing and I was pretty much shaken even before we started. Scared I was, but quitting wasn't my thing.

I was then assigned to Grant's group. The boat was way too big and I couldn't paddle in a straight line. I was really scared every time we went down a rapid—some forwards, and some backwards. I remember Grant saying I was doing a good job. 'He's gotta be kidding!' I thought. Every rapid, I just prayed I wasn't going to flip over.

Paddling was fun, but I was way too scared. I didn't have any swims that day, though. At that time, it never crossed my mind that I was going to ever paddle again.

THEN CAME CATHEDRALS 2006 and the same thing happened. I got the same huge *Cross Dresser* and was in Grant's group again. I still couldn't quite paddle straight, kept on going around in circles and I was as scared as the first time the year before. Watching in amazement at Grant doing all those tricks was an inspiration and I wondered if I was ever going to be such an awesome paddler. Well, I knew I had this fear. And I had to overcome it. The only way—more paddling!

The weekend after, I signed up for a trip down the Yarra River. The water level was really low and there were lots of rocks. The rapids were much milder than the Goulburn and I wasn't as scared as I was before. Nevertheless, I still wasn't all that confident and couldn't really paddle straight.

I was pretty disappointed that I couldn't make the Beginner's Intensive Course on the Goulburn as I found out about it really late. There was, however, a day trip out to the Goulburn the following weekend for those who missed out and I immediately signed up for that. This time round, I was given the GT kayak (which is currently my favourite). It was much more responsive than the other kayakers I had before and I was much happier.

I learned to paddle straight, and was taught river basics—leaning in the right direction and breaking in and out of eddies—by Martin, my group leader that day. By afternoon, I was running the main rapid called The Gnar over and over again. I had conquered my fear, but now I had a new challenge: learning to roll!

I LEARNED OF the weekly pool sessions and decided to go for them. I was taught hip flicks and T-rescues, and pretty soon I was learning how to roll. Initially, I would go

every once in a while, but soon it became a weekly ritual. There were so many techniques I had to learn; some weeks I could do roll after roll, and some weeks I just couldn't roll at all.

After the winter break, I got even more involved in paddling. I went down to the surf twice. The first time at Aireys Inlet, I didn't know how to catch a wave and just ended up swimming heaps. Although I knew how to roll, I panicked every time I flipped over and just pulled the tag. The second time at 13 Mile Beach, the waves were enormous. I flipped over but I was determined not to swim. 'Just push the paddle to the top, twist your hips and flick.' And there I had my first ever live roll. I even managed to surf a couple of waves and was really happy that weekend.

The highlight of the semester had to be the trip up to the Lower Mitta organised by Tim Wallace. There were two carloads of us from Melbourne University and we met up with a bunch of other paddlers from Monash and La Trobe.

For the first day there was a race down the river and we were assigned groups. I was in Grant's group with two others. Very much different from the other beginner trips I had been on, there was no safety and Grant instructed us to just follow him. Carnage they wanted, and carnage there was.

I flipped over on the main rapid, Shark's Tooth, and tried to roll but somehow my technique had gone really wrong. The rapids were enormous and I had my first ever river swim. I struggled (something you should never ever do in a river) and hit myself badly on a rock. Grant came to the rescue and I got out at an eddy.

I was quite shaken and had to bush-bash my way through prickly thorns to the take-out. My team didn't come in last, but we finished with two paddlers and four boats!

After watching the advanced paddlers play-boating in The Hole, I had another go on the rapid. Again, I flipped at the same spot on Shark's Tooth but managed to hang on to my boat and paddle. This time Timmy came to the rescue, emptied my boat in the middle of the river and I scrambled into the boat. Less than half an hour later, I got stuck to a tree and had yet another swim. At this point I'd probably given up trying to do any more rolls.

Following a good night's rest, I was pretty keen to give Shark's Tooth yet another run. The key I learned the day before was to keep on paddling. 'If you see a big rapid, just paddle.' Well, paddle I did and I got down most of the rapid. 'You did it!' shouted Timmy, who was kayaking next to me, over the thundering sounds of the rapid. He'd probably said it too soon, as I eddied out at the wrong spot, got stuck on a rock, and had to swim again. 'Not again!' I was pretty pissed with myself for swimming so much that weekend, but I guess it just keeps me going and wanting to improve so much more.



THE FOLLOWING WEEKEND, I went up with Martin to the Goulbourn. Unlike past trips where we ran the whole river from the dam, this time round we just played on the main rapid, The Gnar. I sat in an eddy for a long time watching other play-boaters there perform tricks in the rapid. I soon gained enough courage, and after a couple of words of advice from Martin, I did my first surf in a "hole" on the main rapid. I learned a lot of skills that weekend—ferry gliding, spotting eddies, surfing in a hole, paddling upstream and heaps more. Understanding how rivers work and how rapids form really helped me build my confidence.

ALL IN ALL, getting into paddling has been a really awesome experience. Although water levels have been really low this year, the skills I learned would certainly prepare me for bigger and more-adrenalin flowing adventures in the years to come.

Thank you to all the paddlers that have been ever-so patient and encouraging: Grant for his leadership and ever-inspirational tricks, and laughing every time I swim; Martin for being ever-so-encouraging and patient in teaching me numerous skills; Timmy and Dave for rescuing me and my kayak on the Mitta; and Mac and Jen for the lessons learned at the pool.

As you can probably tell by now, I'm quite a chicken at heart. But there's an inspirational line that always keeps me going—*Courage is the resistance to fear, mastery of fear, and not absence of fear.* ■



Grace and Grant, an ex-convenor, insane paddler and singer of South Park songs (top). Kitted out for battling the waves (above). The flappy bit fits over the opening in the kayak where you sit, and keeps out the water.

ANOTHER PADDLING

A better way to spend Grand Final Weekend including action photo from a cool, but unrelated, kayaking event.

BY JEN SHERIDAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SARAH NEUMANN

A COUPLE OF MONTHS ago Timmy sent out the call for an Intervarsity Paddling Competition on the Mitta Mitta. At the time the paddling season was looking fairly dire, but surely, we reasoned, it would have rained by the beginning of October...we were wrong. But thankfully, while the rain gods were frowning on the sport, the dam release gods were smiling. So the event was moved to the Lower Mitta, which receives its flow from Dartmouth Dam, and has been absolutely pumping recently.

Thanks to a bountiful supply of M.C. Hammer, T-Spoon, and other such classic bands on the car stereo the drive up felt so much shorter than the four or five hours it actually was. The MUMC contingent were the last to arrive, slotting our tents in next to the La Trobe and Monash paddlers between one and two in the morning on the Friday night. But the next day brought the joys of warm weather paddling in bright sunshine—and for most of us the excitement of paddling on a river for the first time in months was enough to have us up and out of bed at a reasonably early hour and keen to get on the water.

After some debate over breakfast, it was decided that the first run down the river would be in groups of threes and fours, and would be a downriver time trial. The run basically consists of putting in just below the dam wall, paddling some reasonably flat water down to the playwave, some more flat water and small rapids, and then Shark's Tooth, which is about a Grade III+ rapid, followed by fairly flat water to the takeout. Due to the river being at flood levels, the flat water sections manage to become a bit more of a challenge with strong eddy lines, fewer eddies than many were used to and plenty of trees in fast-moving water on either bank.

The first team sent down were Jimbo, a La Trobe paddler called Em, and myself. I was entrusted with choosing our line because I had been up there the previous weekend, which may not have been the best decision. I knew that we wanted to head far right on the left channel of Shark's Tooth, so that wasn't a problem. What may have been slightly more of a problem was that Shark's Tooth crept up on me. Either way, our team made it through the rapid unscathed, which

is more than could be said for many of the other teams. As we stood at the takeout, stopwatch in hand, an upside down boat rounded the corner, closely followed by Grant, who was towing a second upside down boat. Similar stories emerged as each team arrived.

Timmy's team all managed to swim within 50 metres of each other, and not hold onto any of their gear, which gave him the joyous task of rescuing nine separate things: three people, three paddles, three boats. And all in a C1 (a one-person canoe, with only one paddle blade), in which every stroke takes so much more effort than K1 (a one-person kayak, with two paddle blades). Dan also rescued most of his team in a C1, and other teams had numerous rescues and paddlers who walked out the short distance to the road.

The afternoon was largely spent at the playwave, which is created by a river-wide weir. To get onto the wave on river right requires using a tow rope to pull yourself up into a small eddy before moving onto

cuing again. But eventually we all got to the take out, even if Grant and Dan did have to blackberry-bash after chasing Grace's boat past the take-out. The day was capped off nicely with a barbeque and a trip to the Dartmouth pub, which some members appeared to regret the following morning.

Sunday had a far lazier start, and it was late morning by the time we headed down to the playwave again. My attempts to use the towrope resulted in a rather interesting, rock and blackberry-filled swimming experience, at which point I decided that trying out a playboat for the first time was enough of a challenge. Grant, Dan and Timmy were pulling some great moves—Dan's C1 cartwheels in particular drew cheers from the posse on the bank. The bank-dwellers had also been assigned the task of blowing up some large Swiss balls for our ball race down the river, the aim of which is to get the ball to the take-out without using your hands: at times this is not as easy as it might sound. Somehow we managed to keep the swims to a minimum on the main rapid this



An unrelated action shot of a few people screaming downstream on a variety of flotation devices such as the generic lilo, the pink donut (piloted by Grant), a yellow seal (piloted by Jasmine) and intriguingly, what appears to be a capsized Inflatable Ingrid.

the wave without getting tangled up in the rope—something that was a little too complex for me. But the entry on river left only required ferry gliding across to an eddy line that helped suck you upstream into the wave, which seemed far more friendly.

Following a couple of hours of either enjoyable playboating in the sun or relaxing spectatorship, we decided it was time to head to the take out. This time we were only split into two groups, which resulted in a similar amount of carnage on Shark's Tooth, with a large number of people requiring res-

time, whether it was the distraction of chasing a ball or everyone getting more comfortable on the river, I'm sure the rescuers were thankful.

This was a great weekend, offering opportunities to try out playboating, paddle a larger rapid than many of us were used to (and then contend with the subsequent eddy lines), and also to catch up with or meet some paddlers from other clubs. Thanks have to go to Timmy for organising the weekend, and also to those who spent much of their time fishing out swimmers. **M**



Kate Whyte and Kath Hammond, approaching a canyon at the Upper Wollangambe River.

RECOMMENDED CANYONS

Curious about canyoning? Alison's Guide introduces you to a damp kind of abseiling.

BY ALISON THOMSON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOEL BARTLEY

SOME PEOPLE IN MUMC harbour bizarre and largely unfounded superstitions about the extreme dangers of canyoning. Just like when crossing the road, you need to be sensible and mistakes can have very nasty consequences, but canyoning is a lot more fun and far less risky than most people believe. You get to visit marvellous and wild places, with steep and sculpted walls, resident glow-worms, spiralling waterfalls, and lush ferns.

The first misconception is that all canyons are technical. Not so. There are some lovely canyons in the Blue Mountains that do not require ropes at all. In fact, canyoning did not evolve from climbing, but was invented by intrepid bushwalkers. They wanted to follow the mysterious twisting streamways to their conclusion, and hence came up with methods to safely negotiate drops, pools and waterfalls.

Things That Go Wrong

I'D SAY THE most likely things to go wrong when canyoning are:

1. Getting lost attempting to find the canyon
2. Hypothermia
3. Injury (e.g. sprained ankle) due to slipping on a wet rock
4. Rope gets stuck/tangled when you try to pull it down

Notice that only one of these things is related to rope skills, and anyone with a good bushwalking background should be able to avoid the other problems.

Getting Down (Abseiling)

LEARNING TO ABSEIL and set up abseils is straightforward common sense, and once you've learnt the basics, there is a smorgasboard of intermediate canyons to choose from. If you are worried about the commitment factor (often the only way out of a canyon is to continue down) a good strategy is to build confidence by starting off with a single-abseil canyon (e.g. *Empress*). With a bit of confidence and experience, you'll realise there is nothing to worry about and, you can progress to canyons with multiple abseils.

I've compiled a list which is a "recommended progression" of canyons. (I've done all of them, so feel free to ask for more details over a beer at the Clyde). It's obviously biased, and there are other canyons I could have included, including some I really enjoyed at the time (four–five years ago!) but unfortunately in my old age I can't remember them well enough to describe in detail.

The canyons are roughly arranged in order of difficulty, and I chose them because they require and represent a gradual progression of skills and techniques. Beginners should note that the first four don't require any abseiling, and as there are several more such canyons in the guidebook, it's possible to have a great first trip without even taking a rope.



Kath Hammond and Kate Whyte, Claustral Canyon.

Grade 1

Wollangambe 1 & 2

Scenic adventures in a wide and majestic waterway. Both involve lots of swimming, so a PFD (personal flotation device, i.e. lifejacket), or other buoyancy aid might make things more relaxing. Lots of more technical canyons feed into the Wollangambe, so these trips are a great way to familiarise yourselves with the access and exits.

Rocky Creek

It has an exciting, spooky atmosphere because it's cold and very dark. This can also be combined with *Twister* (Grade 2) for an outstanding day out. This combination is a very popular guided trip.

Deep Pass

Pleasant walk through a creek, with occasional scrambling using a fixed handline which is already in place.

Grade 2

Twister

I swear this canyon is like a naturally occurring water theme park! There are numerous waterslides and exciting (but very safe) jump-ins into deep pools. No abseils, but there is a short descent using a fixed handline near the end.

Grand Canyon

A very wide canyon with easy access on a tourist track and a single abseil. I don't think this is as spectacular as the guidebook suggests, but if you are following the progression it's a logical step for building up your confidence and skills.

Grade 3

Empress

Splash and scramble down a lovely creek, negotiating some deep water-sculpted pools to emerge at the top of a 30m waterfall abseil. The anchors are a ridiculously sturdy conglomerate of ringbolts and chains (to keep the legislators happy and the guiding companies in business). The waterfall is on a tourist track, which makes the access very easy! Much entertainment can be elicited from the actions of gawking tourists, and—best of all—there is a café back at the carpark!

Serendipity

A pretty trip, ending in the Wollangambe, with multiple straightforward abseils.

Grade 4

Hole-In-The-Wall

This is my favourite sandstone canyon. It has a stunning roofed-over section like a cave (headtorches are essential) with a beach and a starscape of glow worms. The abseils are mostly short and all easy. The exit into the Bungleboori, itself a very impressive canyon, is gorgeous.

Yilleen

The final 50m exit abseil overlooking Pierces Pass is straightforward, but utterly spectacular.

Claustral

An absolute classic, with three successive waterfall abseils spiralling through a dark and secretive section. Do it on a weekday, because it's a deservedly popular trip and you don't want to have a freezing wait in a traffic jam at the abseils. At the bottom you wander awestruck through a very narrow section with extremely steep walls, and only a bright ribbon of sunlight as a ceiling. Note that the exit is quite technical with some exposed scrambling (I think it's harder than the actual canyon) so don't let your guard down.



Typical abseil for a Grade 4 canyon.

Grade 5

Devil's Pinch

A beautiful canyon in a remote setting—the Wolgan Valley. The access walk is quite long but the abseils are easy. The final section is an amazing walk through a majestically tall, narrow and steep-side gorge.

Whungee-Wheengee

Another canyon which exits into the Wollangambe. It has a cool section of swimming through a narrow, twisting tunnel, and a challenging roof sniff (or duck-under!) The abseils are generally short but can be a bit tricky to get onto.

Butterbox

A terrific round trip with great views on the access and exit. There is a gripping abseil onto a chockstone in the midst of a waterfall. You do need to rock-climb out, but the route is extremely easy and ridiculously well bolted. After I unnecessarily dragged a sodden 50m rope through the entire canyon, when I got there I realised that a static rope would be fine.

Grade 6

ALL THE GRADE 6 canyons are in Kanangra Boyd National Park, which is near the Blue Mountains but far enough away that the terrain is totally different. The scale of these open, quartzite (I think) canyons is much bigger and more impressive and intimidating than the sandstone canyons I have so far described.

On your first visit to the area, I very strongly encourage you to do Kalang Falls first. Kalang Falls is only Grade 4, and spits you out right at the start of the exit track (a long uphill scree slope, optimistically entitled *Murdering Gully*). This way when you do the longer canyons in the area you will already be familiar with the exit and won't get lost on the way out.

Kanangra Main

All I can say is: 180m waterfall! It is followed by numerous "small" 40–50m drops later on and is some of the most spectacular terrain I have ever seen, on a breathtaking, mind blowing scale. You'll need to move very efficiently to get the canyon done before dark—it took Lincoln and me almost the whole day. It's a long and committing trip, but ultimately straightforward and highly enjoyable if you have the right skills.

The Carrot

I am planning an MUMC canyoning trip to the Blue Mountains in September 2007.

THERE WILL BE opportunities for canyoners of all standards, in a similar vein to the 2006 trip (*see Grand Canyon in this issue of the Mountaineer—Ed*). I am very keen to have a small group of people who have good basic outdoor skills but are new to canyoning. My plan is that you will initially go out with more experienced canyoners, but also do some appropriate canyons independently (crucial for building up experience and confidence).

Of course the trip will also be open to those who have been canyoning before and/or people who already possess the technical skills (e.g. people who can lead climb or have vertical caving skills). For those who are ready, the end of the trip will include an advanced foray into the Kanangra area.

Al's September Canyoning To-Do List is shown below.

Starlight (Grade 3)


It's been highly recommended to me by several NSW natives. It's out in the Wolgan Valley, and I assume there are lots of glow worms so it will be very pretty.

Danae Brook (Grade 6)

Another Kanangra trip, supposedly even longer and wilder than Kanangra Main.

Carra Beanga or Wheengee-Whungee (Grade 6?)

Because I think it will be a great adventure to do an overnight canyon...

OF COURSE, IF you would like to organise your own canyoning adventure at another time (N.B. not in winter!) I would be delighted to help you plan a trip. So if you are remotely curious (get it?!) please have a chat with me, or send an email to canyoning@mumc.org.au 



Sven was looking mighty fine (top). The Royal Danford lines up a small drop (above). The Thomson River, shrouded in mist (main).

THOMSON RIVER

BY MAC BRUNCKHORST

A GORGEOUS SPRING MORNING finds me awake way too early on the banks of the Thomson River. We are here to make use of the environmental flow scheduled to be released, a rare opportunity to see one of Victoria's most beautiful rivers. The mist is thick at 6.30AM and no-one else is out of bed. I take some photos and eat to kill time. It's always exciting paddling something new. You never know what is coming around the next corner. I can barely wait to get on the water.

After everyone is up and has eaten we unload the car and get ready to leave. We are finally on the water at 9.00AM. Dan is our fearless leader for the day with Sven, Lincoln, Kaye and myself making up the rest of the party. The river is narrow with lush vegetation along the banks and soon we come across a water dragon basking on a rock. It doesn't seem fazed when Dan paddles up and takes a photo.

Timmy has given us a run down of the rapids we will be facing. He tells us of the infamous killer-fang falls, a large waterfall with sharp fang-like rocks at the bottom.

We aren't afraid. Sven has also had a dream during the night about a tributary creek on river-left which you need to ferry across in order not to end up in a terminal hole... enough of the fantasy.

The rapids are small but the scenery is really pretty. We paddle on. The surrounding hills become steeper and we end up in a steep sided gorge. Some bigger rapids are found here with some waves to surf on. I'm glad to be wagging Uni. This trip definitely falls into the mental health day category. Bend after bend in the river brings more rapids, small drops, chutes and boulder gardens. We reach the end of the gorge and find flat water. An hour of flat water paddling awaits us at the end of the section. Nearly there we think. More rapids follow. They must be the last ones. It is now about 1.30PM. On we paddle.

A fork in the river gives us two choices. I go right; Dan and Sven go left. Lincoln and Kaye follow me. We find a sweet little S-bend rapid and bomb down. Below is another classy drop. Getting hungry. I eat some chocolate. Lunch follows soon after. Stretch the legs, allow some blood to flow again. Camembert and ham on sourdough.

Dan and I look at the map. It is hard to tell exactly where we are, maybe a couple

more corners until the flat. Back in the river again ready for the final push. We soon come across another fork and again I go right and Dan goes left. This time everyone else comes with me down a small rapid into a big pool. The only exit is a box-like gap in the rock about 2.5 metres wide. The sides are vertical and the water is churning through. Sven says, 'Cool,' and is off. We all follow and cruise on down to meet Dan at the bottom.

We find one last big rapid and paddle down after Dan. He has his video going. Lincoln does it with the most style when he gets out of shape and goes over a big rock sideways doing a pirouette on its point. Kaye and I get our cameras out while the others walk back to the top and run it again. Dan does a sweet boof and Sven and Lincoln style their way down.

The final hour approaches.

My boat is short and slow. The flat seems to go forever. Sven has his legs out to stop the pain. The end in sight I push on. The bank by the car feels fantastic as I drag myself out of my boat and promptly fall over. I take off some clothes and feel much more normal. Lying down on my boat in the sun I promptly fall asleep as the shuttle is done. What a fantastic day boating. **M**

NOT QUITE NOWRA

A whole lot of climbing was at Arapiles, instead of the traditional Nowra in New South Wales.

BY SEAN GRIFFITHS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SIMON MCKENZIE

IT'S THE FIRST week of semester break. Club custom says all climbers migrate north, to the warmer, steeper and hopefully drier surrounds of Nowra, south of Sydney. Customs can be broken—and that's what happened this year. On Friday 23rd June a convoy of Club members set off west to everyone's favourite crag, Mount Arapiles, for a week of climbing. The numbers varied throughout the week, but comprised a core group who stayed for a week or more: Lachlan, Kathryn, Michelle, myself, Lyndel, Alice, Rhonda, Kate, Jason, Chad and Stefan. We were also joined by Al, Lincoln, Simon, Dave and Claire.

The weather gods smiled upon us for most of our stay, which meant everyone could get plenty of good climbing, with four members leading for their first time. Everyone has their own memorable moments, new skills and plans from the trip.

On the first day of the trip—my first on rock since Easter Arapiles—I found myself walking towards ***Garden Gnome (18)*.

"Wha? You're leading it, right?" I asked Lachlan, with a growing sense of intimidation. Apparently not.

With a mixture of abuse (good-natured of course, just what I need at times), encouragement and, I'm ashamed to admit, some resting on gear, I topped out. The hardest climb I'd lead for probably four months, and no warm-up: thanks, Lachie. Yes, there is a garden gnome watching you pull up to the top. I clipped the chains, set up a top rope, and lowered off. For the rest of the day, our little group sped up or thrashed about on this very entertaining climb.

DAY TWO WAS more interesting. Seven of us set our sights on the Left Watchtower Face, and soon ****Siren (9)*, ***Hot Flap (14)* and **Creon/Tales of Brave Ulysses (18)* were occupied. The belay points became a little crowded.

Lachlan, myself, Lyndel, Kathryn and Rhonda were all attached to the two bolts that formed a belay in the middle of the wall, and set up for a great show. Michelle was about to step across the "sickening void" on lead. Going up a cliff with a rope is one thing. Going across a whole lot of emptiness, aiming at small holds with only your balance to save you, is psychologically

another thing altogether, especially when there is no gear between you and the belay (though in this case the belay was about half a metre behind her). But she did it.

Michelle and Alice rapidly finished off 145m of fantastic climbing for the day. Having met up with the girls at the next belay point, I ran into a slight problem, namely that all the best gear places were taken and the best belay position as well. Never mind. Use the rope in the anchor, I'll make it work.

Lyndel followed me up. I said my farewell to Michelle as she headed up the next pitch, and soon I was leading my fourth pitch for the day. I realised there was a problem. I hadn't paid enough attention to the route picture, and was off-route.

Ah, well. I knew where I was heading, it'd be alright. Shiny thing off to the left? The bolt I was supposed to clip. Bugger. Slabby climbing, good practise. Enough holds, and the occasional horizontal break that was great for a cam. Only problem at the moment? That's all the gear I could place, and was running out of cams. There's the second-last belay up ahead. Bring it on.

Looked down, realised I couldn't even see my last piece that was below a bulge well below me. No worries, the climbing's easy, and I need practise at being run out.

"Lyndel! Slack!" I called.

"Theres no rope left!"

"I'm...up...shit...creek!" I yelled, thinking back to the route description—(4) 50m. And I used our 50m rope in the belay...help!

Our mighty leader to the rescue: down came a rope and a red-head intent on mocking me all he could. I saw the techniques for a rescue first-hand—pity about the circumstances. Lachie and I hauled my poor belay slave straight up the last pitch, meaning straight through an overhang. She survived.

We rappled down quickly and soon were back at the house, laughing about it. I was the beer slave for several days, and if anyone from that trip makes the same mistakes, you deserve all you get! Late that night, Kate and Jason arrived to swell our numbers.

THE FOLLOWING DAY was one of partner swapping, with the addition of Hannah and Minh to the mix, both ex-club climbers.

Climbing with Hannah gave me the chance to second around my limit and experience climbing with one of Victoria's best female climbers. A full day's climbing for me was a quiet one for her.



Michelle leaves the Tennis Court, the fourth pitch of The Shroud, while David Rochwerger belays.

Thanks to Minh's efforts Lyndel received her first introduction to gear placement and the rest of the group spread themselves throughout the Organ Pipes and other areas to climb to their hearts content.

THE NEXT DAY was one of the learn-to-lead days. The recent additions to the club were walked through the basics of gear placement, setting up an anchor, and a few of them got their first taste of lead climbing. Pre-placed gear was set up on **Maximus (17)* and with a top-rope for safety, people had their first time clipping gear to a rope.

Two days at Mitre Rock followed, allowing Kate, Kathryn, Lyndel and Jason to get their first pure lead experiences, on ***Exodus (6)*. These efforts were accompanied by a mixture of fear, jubilation and exhaustion.

On the Friday, the weather was finally turning against us, with the occasional shower, and near-complete cloud cover.

Around this time another weekend batch of club climbers arrived, some of whom had been around at the start of the week as well. This gave the Organ Pipes a very friendly feel, with multiple club climbing pairs within earshot. Unfortunately at this point our luck broke.

Scattered showers had delayed our start, and finally, while sitting at the top of ****D Minor (14)*, they ceased to be scattered. Body heat leached out of me while Rhonda worked her way up the rather overhanging route on holds that resembled small ponds, until we finally rappled down and made a bolt for shelter. I have to thank Claire for backing up my rappel, since I could neither feel nor trust my fingers by that stage.

WHILE NOT ONE of the standard big club trips, everyone who made an appearance had a great time, pushed their climbing that bit further and hopefully will be back for more in the near future. **M**

ROGAINING

What it is and why it has so much running.

BY ALAN DALEY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARLENA MENDE AND
JAMES SOUTHWELL

IN SEPTEMBER 2006, DESPITE an outstanding rogaine at the Victorian Championships by Alaster, James and Phil, MUMC again came away without a University challenge trophy. However, with the introduction of a University category at all rogaines in 2007, we can build up skills over the months leading up to the next championship event.

So what is it?

Rogaining is often likened to 24-hour orienteering. There are checkpoints to be found in the bush, and the event duration varies from shorter six-hour events to the classic 24-hour event. There are crucial differences that make rogaining cool.

Rogaining is usually over a mixture of farmland and forest, so the sorts of areas you go to are unusual; being off the beaten track, there is more likelihood of bumping into cool fauna, different flora and old mines and shacks.

Rogainers use the regular bushwalking maps that are only slightly altered to include a few extra tracks and they also have the markers indicated—with digital printing, marking your own maps is a thing of the past but explains why your compass may have a triangle and circle stencil.

In a team of two or three, you *must* learn to navigate independently: notice where you are, work out how to get where you want to go, and adjust for mistakes you make; all this for the satisfaction of finding a spunky checkpoint. Rogainers don't hide them like some orienteers do!

The course is set so that the best team should not quite complete the course. Therefore, there is a huge amount of flexible decision-making required when mapping a route to score the most points—while taking in the best sights, if you're a social roganier like me!

Best of all, for your \$20 or so, you get free grub at the "Hash House", cooked by volunteers, so it's good rather than cheap and ordinary. **M**



Not all rogaines involve being lost in some random forest—rogaines do occasionally take you into less pristine environments. Here, Isabelle and Alison tackle extreme navigation challenges in urban Marysville.



Alaster with a white-and-orange rogaining marker; one of the main goals in rogaining is locating them. Doing so allows you to collect points (left). Marlena, Alison and Isabelle with maps and compass (right).



Rogaines are also known to involve bizarre themes such as the Mad Hatters Six Hour Rogaine. Maya, Alaster and Geoffrey attempt to navigate their way out of hat-hell in Marysville.

PHOTOS: MARLENA MENDE (TOP, MIDDLE RIGHT);
JAMES SOUTHWELL (MIDDLE LEFT, BOTTOM)



THE WHITE LINE

BY STUART HOLLOWAY

NICK, BEN AND I were travelling around New Zealand for a couple of weeks ski touring when four day high pressure system moved over the island. Lured by the promise of the high mountains we piled all the gear in the Subaru and drove to Fox on the west coast.

Heli services lifted us in to Pioneer and we headed out for an afternoon ski up to Governor Col on the main divide. We had debated whether to spend the money on flights or just to go touring towards Black Peak above Wanaka but, looking out on the lake and ocean, surrounded by the big peaks and then enjoying the long run on wind blown powder, all doubts were left behind. It was a magnificent place to be and a wonderful place to ski.

WE WENT CLIMBING each of the next two mornings before going for short tours in the afternoons. We made the first ascent of White Line, short, narrow pencil of ice running up a dark rock buttress but were unable to complete the second route, the Moonshield, despite climbing passages of extreme difficulty and beauty. It will have to wait for this spring.

On the fourth day we skied the great run from Pioneer to Chancellor hut to get a chopper, although traversing big fields of avalanche debris in the trough made it slower and less fun than normal. It was just the sort of trip you hope to make: fun, safe, great conditions giving both excellent climbing and pleasant skiing, and it is always nice to do new things. **M**



Ben Hawthorne and Nick Morgan arranging a rappel on White Line (left). The other guy on the right is Stu.

Ben belaying and Nick climbing mixed ground on the first pitch of White Line (above left).

Ben in the 55-metre corner attempting the first ascent of Moonshield on the Moonshine Buttress (far left).

FERGUS RIVER CAVE

BY SHANNON CRACK

ON APRIL 6TH WE set out to do Fergus River Cave (County Clare, Republic of Ireland) with two Aussies and Brian, a local caver and our guide.

The cave, like all Clare caves, floods to the roof in high rain. While the resurgence at the moment is a little pool—almost a puddle—50m downstream of the entrance, the flood pulse generates a three-metre tall geyser at the entrance

The cave itself is basically a single bedding plane for the whole length of the cave—crawly fun for all. A short way into the cave is “The Nick”, an interesting bit of cave which is extremely convenient: without it, the cave would end here. You come to what appears to be a dead end passage. It is a wall and there is no way it could be on pure bed-rock, or so it seems. However, in the roof there is a small hole. Standing below the hole on a well placed rock just above head height, the passage continues through a low horizontal squeeze.

After a little bit of struggling you can haul yourself into the gap between the roof and the boulder. About now you realise

it's rather flat along the top of the boulder and the roof and the floor match up quite well—oh, I see this used to be attached to the roof until it fell down.

After The Nick the cave continues as a streamway at the bottom of the bedding plane. Onward the crawling continues and after a couple of bends it opens out into a chamber. This is short lived as a few metres later there is more crawling. This repeats a couple of times and then the cave really opens up—sideways.

Now, this is the interesting part the cave. One of the reasons Brian was keen to do this cave was that he didn't go all the way to the end of the cave the last time he was here. The group Brian was with ended up doing a circle without reaching the end. At this point the cave had been partially filled by mud banks from floor to roof but none of them extend to the end of the cave as a single bank, so you can go round them in circles.

The cave from is orientated north-south; a northerly course should get us to the end of the cave. This time a compass was brought and at the beginning of the area we took a bearing north. Keeping track of our turns we headed off, leaving the cave pack behind. Brian keeps asking if we are heading

north and I keep replying ‘Yes, left more,’ and offering to check the compass if he'd like definite proof. We hit the next feature, a tributary streamway which crosses the cave passage and flows into the main streamway, but don't need to follow it today.

Keeping high and right, we continue northward shortly reaching the sump at the end of the cave—while there are a few small passages that continued onwards, none of them actually go anywhere. The only progression further into the cave is along the stream by diving, or in very low water conditions—so not today.

We took a break and then headed back out, not paying as much attention to direction as on the way in. This resulted in us reaching the start of the mud banks (where we left the pack) from an unexpected direction. We were geographically misplaced once on the way out when we missed the correct hole upwards and ended up in a dead end. A short backtrack brought us to the correct way out and we continued on.

The Nick was much more fun on the way out—head-first. I suspect that going out that way is what convinced Brian that I'm quite insane as he more sensibly followed, feet-first. **M**



Closer to home, this is the Jenolan Showcave. This has nothing to do with Ireland at all. There's a stair and handrail on the right of frame.

Descending from the Langi Ghiran summit, with the Mt. Cole range in the distance.

MT. LANGI GHIRAN

BY SU LI SIN

IN WESTERN VICTORIA, a little known mountain - Langi Ghiran - has held my fascination for the last couple of years, ever since an advertised trip for it had to be cancelled and combined with another. Parks Victoria advises that the walk to the summit is unmarked, and to be attempted by "experienced walkers" only... a sign that not many people would have tried the walk. Hence, I was rather excited when the opportunity came up for the walk.

Five eager walkers met at the clubrooms one early Sunday morning—three of whom were unfortunately sick, including the leader. So we would play it by ear, and decide on the exact route of our walk as we went along. It was nevertheless a beautiful day, and the drive out was pleasant.

An obscure unsealed road off the Western Highway brought us into the state park. We drove past our starting point to see what was at the picnic area and also to see how far the walk along the road was if we decide to go ahead with the circuit. After a toilet break, we drove back to the starting point of the walk. For some reason, beginners are always ready to walk the minute they get out of the car; Kei, Brianna and C.S. stood around for awhile waiting for Andrew and me to finish faffing around.

We finally started the day climbing up the track; the clear day rewarded us with views of the Ararat township, framed by the mountain ranges that make up the Grampians. I had never seen the Grampians from

the east, and it was wonderful to be able to see the Sierra and Difficult Ranges stretch across the horizon. The track brought us to the Hidden Lagoon. The lagoon was very much hidden indeed—there was no water whatsoever.

We sat there soaking up the sun, finally deciding to forge on to the summit. Looking at the way the cliffs were placed and the steepness of the general area, we marked out our route and followed a bearing to our first feature—a knoll on the gentlest-looking spur. It turned out to be a rather defined spur, and so we picked our way upwards amongst the boulders that were scattered around.

Past the first set of rocky outcrops, we found a series of pink ribbons tied to trees—possibly marking the route to the summit. We followed them for a bit, since they appeared to be along our intended route. Walking between two sets of rocky outcrops we came to a split in the track. Assuming the routes would converge, Andrew and I decided to take a route each—I kept on the left route which continued slightly uphill, while he took the right track which went downhill. The rest followed him, so I walked on alone.

Our assumption was correct, both routes led to the massive rocky outcrop which led to the summit. Hearing cracking branches to the right but having boulders block my views of them, I proceeded to climb, knowing I'd meet them further up. I enjoyed the few minutes of solitude I had: finding my route up, feeling the sun shining on me and the breeze rushing through my hair, and

watching the views all around me as I went higher. I couldn't help smiling from pure happiness. I'm also reminded of the other rocky mountains I've been on—Mt. Difficult, Pine Mountain...

True enough, I saw them a while later. I stopped and waited for everyone to catch up. We decided to stop for lunch and sat around at a flat-ish spot, as we soaked in the panoramic views.

The wind made it a little too cold for a siesta. Having decided to continue on with the circuit, we climbed up a bit more to the unmarked summit and looked across to the neighbouring mountains of Cole and Buan-gor. We took the customary group photos before picking our way down amongst rocks, cliffs and mossy surfaces.

This time round, Andrew went off on his own amongst the rocks, while the girls were behind me as I picked a vague footpad that ran roughly in the direction of the compass bearing we were following.

We eventually stumbled onto the walking track that led us back down to the picnic area that we drove to earlier that day. As C.S. put it, we were walking along the path of least resistance, and we fell into rhythmic strides, getting back to the cars with plenty of daylight to spare. We ended up at Ballarat for an early dinner with plenty of chatter.

Langi Ghiran would go down in my memories as one of mixed feelings. A walk destination finally fulfilled. A beautifully navigated walk. Gorgeous views. Brilliant company. Engaging conversation. Sadly though, my final exploratory walking trip with the club before I moved to Sydney. **M**

THE UNSEEN STONE



Phil climbs out of the Cave on the first ascent of the Cave Variant, Mt. Dixon.

HUMAN CELLS REPRODUCE continuously, forever dividing and replicating themselves. With any replication there is a possibility of mutation in the DNA. Any mutated cells may continue to replicate. Probability dictates that the longer you live the more likely that an aggressive mutation may take hold.

Most of these cancers do not produce identifiable symptoms until they are well established.

THE NEW ZEALAND mountains have difficult access, variable conditions and famously ferocious weather. The technical cruxes of routes don't tend to be too difficult in the modern sense but climbing the big peaks, especially by their hard routes, is about more than just the hardest move. The horrendous weather contributes to the enormous glaciation of the Mt. Cook region, its steepness and the abundance of ice cliffs. The temperate setting makes ice conditions fickle, the length of the climbs and descents and the shattered nature of much of the rock make major climbs a serious undertaking—an act of physical and emotional commitment requiring timing, judgement and technical competence.

No matter how fit or skilled you are though, the most important thing in alpinism is the window.

You need time, weather, access and conditions to coincide before you have the chance to see whether you are good enough. Climbers can work hard to interpret the weather, predict conditions and put themselves in position to make a climb, but without the window there is nothing you can do.

The window is more valuable than money, more significant than skill, beautiful and fleeting as hope. By car, helicopter and on foot I chase these openings. I pressure people and pour out my earnings and sweat in pursuit of their promise, of the chance of experience and expression.

IN JUNE, AFTER forty years of practising medicine, my father retired, looking forward to spending time at home with my mother and his plants and animals. They were very pleased to have time with each other to enjoy the quiet and the rewards of a long and busy working life together.

Sometime, probably in January last year, some of his glial cells mutated, although there were no signs of this as he played golf and went fishing with his grandchildren.

OVER THE YEARS I made three serious efforts to climb the Balfour Face of Tasman without ever getting on the route. I had a partner back out part way up the approach because he was distracted by a relationship breakdown. The following year Ben and I turned back because the avalanche conditions meant we couldn't reach the climb safely before the weather would go bad again.

With Phil and Nick I went into the Balfour from the west side, but the ice on the face was already thin and conditions stayed warm so we climbed rock on Drake and Magellan. This year I took some time off guiding to climb with friends. Before Christmas Phil and I got into Plateau hut. We climbed technical new mixed lines on Mt. Dixon and on the Balfour Face and were able to just sneak a flight out in poor conditions.

The pilots are only scared of what they can't see, so they won't fly in cloud as, in the mountains, the clouds tend to have rocks in them. Initially we couldn't lift off, surrounded by spindrift and lost in swirling white as all the fresh snow, blasted by rotor wash, raged around us. The pilot called Lachie out of the hut to crouch in the snow and give us some fixed reference to find our way out of the shifting world.

WHEN I PHONED HOME at Christmas mum was worried because Dad had been a bit confused during a trial in which he had had to give evidence and was sometimes struggling to find the words for his ideas.

THE LONG DISTANCE maps promised a five day spell of clear, initially very cold weather. Ben, Lachie and I drove to Mt Cook with big hopes but it kept snowing for two more days. We struggled through the icefall in new snow, cursing as we were engulfed in cloud, wind and more snow despite the forecast of "becoming fine everywhere".

The weather stayed cold and cloudy the next day as we waited at Gardiner Hut, thwarting our hopes that the snow might consolidate, and again as we waded laboriously, despite some tracks in place, up the upper glacier to Empress. Still, the sky cleared in the late afternoon and from the hut we could see the south face of Hicks seamed with ice and we expected four days of good weather.

The evening heat loosened the face and in the hut we could hear the clatter of rock and ice falling down the face. We couldn't really see the debris fall as it had already speared into the bergschrund and glacier at the base of the face by the time we looked for the impacts echoing around the cirque.

DAD CAUGHT A SIX pound yellowbelly in the dam. Mum worried that he seemed quiet and tired.

WE HEADED UP a steep, thin ice runnel. The climbing was excellent, with good ice and multiple bulges until it turned rotten above a very steep, technical shallow corner. I tried climbing on the left but unconsolidated snow over featureless rock forced me to back down and try the steeper line on the right.

It was hard.

I could only get tools to stick in a narrow seam of solid ice and the stiff snow over the steep rock below collapsed at every kick, leaving me delicately bridged on crampon points on shallow edges. With my last ice screw now far below, it was starting to be a bit intimidating but I pushed up, hoping to work my way through the overhang.

More of the dripping ice broke away and I found myself committed to the moves. Aggressively I pulled high, stamped onto a rock edge and finally swung a pick deep into good ice in the flow above. My breathing slowed and the pitch eased as I ran out the rope. Ben and Lachie followed, both falling off the bulge.

I backed off after thirty metres of the next pitch, a big shield of thin ice detached from the rock with water running behind it. Everything appeared so wet and unprotected that the route didn't seem worthwhile; we rappelled and walked further down the face to climb some other ice pitches. Tomorrow would be better and we could climb the big fat ice column of the gunbarrels route, Grade 6 but easier than what we had been on today.

DAD HELPED MY brother fix some fencing around the property and, after much coercion, saw his doctor for a checkup. At dinner he didn't remember doing either.

IT WAS WARM all night. Before dawn a northerly washed across the glacier as we broke trail from the hut. The base of the face was running with water. Debris continued to fall in the dawning light. Access to the climbing was a pain, which is why it hadn't been our first choice, but we should have been here yesterday.

There is a special terror being in the line of rockfall. The rising ballistic whine, the sweet cordite stench of sparks crushed out of the rock, the rigid clinging to the face, knowing that nothing will change the scything course of the stones, already accelerating through space before you hear them, and the bowel-loosening relief as the thudding impacts mean it is over...then the sick certainty that more will come.

We headed over to a shorter line up a steepish, narrow couloir that we could do before the heat broke up more of the face.

THE SCAN REVEALED a large tumour branching out from the left pre-frontal lobe and intruding into both hemispheres of the brain so he was rushed to hospital in Melbourne. In little more than a day its rapid growth and the associated swelling caused major impairment of gross motor function and overall level of consciousness.

AS WE RETURNED to the hut in the still early morning the wind had stopped, the face was quiet and the air cold. Climbing conditions almost seemed perfect and the proud pillar of the gunbarrels was there, tempting, taunting, so close, out the window all day. Perhaps.

Again and again I returned to the balcony or window to stare. Perhaps we should have gone. Why had the day got colder in the hours after dawn? Doubt, temptation, regret and desire dance in my mind.

LATER, MUM WILL obsessively worry and wonder. Could it have been seen sooner? Should he have had the surgery? When he left his keys behind, was that a symptom? Should she have known? Relentlessly she

will work over every detail, revisiting the mundane and forgettable with awful meaning.

GARY ARRIVES WITH a client, followed by Pat and Brian then a pair of English lads. Everyone has turned back from their goals because of the conditions. Despite this it is a fun night; we are a community and our world is beautiful.

In the distance the peaks stand above the clouds but the face blazes in lurid sunshine, the gunbarrels, maybe thinner, maybe bluer, still a strident column calling across the snow. I do not see rockfall sweep the route.

In the night it is even warmer and the winds gust, blowing away our plans to try Aoraki (Mt. Cook). The mountains are closing down. Everyone is heading out. On the glacier we are sheltered and I feel taunted by the gunbarrels. Perhaps. I look with lasting hunger then turn and move on. It is quite a fun day with friends in the mountains. The decision is more powerful than doubt, its rightness is embodied in our joy.

THERE IS A MESSAGE to call home. We drive into the night and I fly with the dawn across the mountains and the ocean. Now, weeks later, I arrive every morning with the newspaper, maintaining a polite fiction, more for

myself than my father, and sit. The low sun presses against the glass, flaring the whiteness of the room and the hospital could be anywhere as I wait with my ambiguous desires.

STARS BURN, THE storm blows, cells divide, a stone falls. The nurse pads quietly past. Silently we watch.

I YEARN TO CLIMB again but this is all the expression I can give. I sit and he sits and we know and don't know and perhaps we—possibly it's just me—see and recognise what is not seen. Is this the window? Has it closed? Will it come tomorrow?

WHO KNOWS WHAT is to come? Who understands what has happened? A tremor runs through his jaw. What expression can there be? Sitting still but moving on, we wait for the window. **M**



Walking out through the icefall, Ben indulges in some crevasse-jumping.



A brief patch of sun at Gardiner Hut. Ben with toilet and the south face of Aoraki (Mt. Cook) in the background (above).



Ben and Lachie in the icefall during poor weather conditions.



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