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The MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY MOUNTAINEERING CLUB Inc. was founded in 1944 and aims to bring together those interested in outdoor activities such as bushwalking, rock climbing, paddling, mountaineering, rogaining, conservation, caving and canyoning through trips and social activities. New members are welcome.

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COVER: CHECKING OUT THE PLAYGROUND
BY: LEO DUNSTAN-POTTER
CATEGORY: CLUB ACTIVITY
PIE & SLIDE OVERALL WINNER 2017



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THE MOUNTAINEER WAS EDITED AND
FORMATTED BY ANNA DETMOLD

PHOTO BY: LUKE FRISKEN
JACK AT CLEAN CUTS, THE GRAMPIANS

Described as the best line in Australia, and a superb mixed climb at 20M2. This was followed up with “It is not a practice route”. An uninviting postscript that didn’t help allay our doubts about getting up the route, neither of us had any time on big walls and we had very limited aid climbing expertise. Little did we know that this aspect of the climb would be the least of our worries.

In the week prior to heading off, we were still short aid climbing gear, and rummaging together the laughable number of #1 cams we were suggested to bring along, on top of a few extra-large cams.

Eyeing up the route from the base of the cliff, I was allowing myself some final faffing time, trying to identify the purpose of these mysterious wooden blocks that were left there and deciding where the line starts. This ended up being a waste of time. The first few metres hardly mattered, the crux and the bulk of the line was yet to come. And it kept on coming. Stance after stance, a glance upwards and then downwards would reveal that progress was slow albeit steady, the half-way point was yet to come.

Bumping cams up, down-climbing to recycle gear, and nonsensical attempts at finding rests were among the antics deemed necessary to tackle this pitch. Only after 30m of off-width does the crack peter out into a hand-sized crack. A much welcome reprieve that calmed fears of running out of suitable gear.

A somewhat messy belay station was set up, and while belaying Luke up, there was time to reflect and focus on the surroundings; primarily, the insanely strong winds. Not to be

deterred, we soldiered on and after both arriving at the belay ledge, matters were looking better. Thankfully, I was able to borrow one of Luke’s layers to fend off the strengthening wind. Alas, it was not meant to be. After an honourable amount of progress was made on the second pitch by Luke, we called it a day. The unrelenting wind and the approaching rain were deemed to be too much, and we had a convenient excuse of not wanting to make our non-climber friends – who made the trek up with us to The Fortress – wait for what could have ended up a benightment.

Little did we know that retreat would not be an easy option either. Cue my big mistake for

the day: in the interests of getting off quicker, I decided to get one step ahead by throwing the ropes down ready to abseil on while Luke was reverse aiding the second pitch. By the time it came to coming down, we realised the tangled mess we were getting into. This wind was not something to sneeze at too – the image I won’t forget is of a rope hitting Luke from above him, this was the trailing end of the rope that got picked up from under him before going full circle around him!

Accepting responsibility for getting the ropes caught on numerous chicken heads, I volunteered to go down and sort it out, and with a redirect and down-climbing well to the side

PHOTO BY: GUILLAUME STANGUENNEC
TANER BATTLING STRONG WINDS ON THE DESCENT



PASSPORT TO INSANITY

By: Taner Kucukyrak



of the line of least resistance, it turned out to be a rather precarious affair; the rope ended up getting trapped on something else as soon as it was free of one snag. Eventually, I was able to coil the two ropes around me and feed them out as I went down the final metres and was ready to give a bottom belay. Sounds easy right? With the length of the rope paid out, this gave ample surface area for the wind to catch: enough that Luke often thought I was holding the rope tight on my end; and enough to lift me off the ground, despite using a belay device to make the job easier.

After finally getting down, we realised there was no way we

could reliably get the ropes down, and after a fair bit of deliberation, we decided to tie off the ropes to a tree and come back for them another day.

The next week, we were back, brimming with confidence, having got all the gear ready to go, we now had some practise using etriers, and all the beta for the approach and first half of the climb. The story up to the point of the last attempt was less complicated this time around, and before too long, we were back at the same spot, Luke getting ready to plunge into the ominous downward tending roof crack. If I had not known Luke's unfamiliarity with aid climbing, I could have been convinced he'd done all

of this before, nothing about his movements seemed amateurish, at least to an untrained eye. Not long after, he disappeared over the lip and it was my turn to follow. The temptation to make a farcical attempt at freeing the route was too great, though the reality of it involved only making it up to the start of the roof before flailing and losing the composure to clip into something. After falling a few metres into free space and having to prusik back up, I resigned to the realisation that this is, and will probably always be, way beyond me. Instead, I opted to play with trying some hand jams here and there in between the aid. A big kudos to Nyrrie Dodd for the first free ascent, now over thirty years ago.

Celebrating our success, and again having a convenient reason to be done with it and get down, we rapped off another party's tat and had a triumphant walk back to the bottom with plenty of daylight left in the day.

The alternative for keen beans is to summit by way of a third pitch, though the guidebook description of the way down makes the aforementioned comments pale in comparison. Apparently, you have a choice between rigging up a Tyrolean at best, or finding a possibly non-existent sketchy piton on the way down a multi-pitch abseil!

GEAR BETA

A standard rack, plus:

- At least 1 each of a #4, #5, and #6 cam (black diamond sizes). An extra #5 could easily be used
- 6 or 7 #1 cams
- Metolius 8 step aiders as they were what we could get our hands on
- Surprisingly, Fifi hooks came in handy!

A STELA DAY

I'm either excessively optimistic, stupid, or possibly both. Matt is suggestible. The weather forecast is okay for Saturday, so I convince him that a moderate chance of rain and a high chance of adventure is reasonable.

It's four hours to the Chimney Pots car park, eating leftovers and dodging roos on dirt roads in the dark. We roll out of our hammocks when it gets light and trudge up the hill, heading for a couple of potential new routes Aaron & I had spotted a couple of weeks before.

We spent an hour or so cleaning loose rock and moss off a line each, leaves and rubbish getting everywhere. Matt strategically relocates a burnt

tree. I get slightly intimidated by a line I've been thinking about for 2 weeks.

Matt goes first on the shorter line. The rock is worse than we thought, and the moves harder. I start to contemplate if I'd keep him off the ground by launching face-first down the slope into the burnt tree, but he gets some more gear in. I follow, feeling slightly guilty for sending him up this thing, and slightly glad that I did.

I've been procrastinating for a while, but I'm running out of excuses. I try not to think about the loose rock I removed, climbing warily through the first hard section to a good rest at about 7 metres. I pull into the crux, and the pump is almost instant. I mess up a few gear placements and get a few sequences horribly wrong, and the



jugs at the top feel much worse than they should. With the last piece a couple of metres below me it all starts to feel hard, but I really don't want to do this again today. Matt makes it all look a lot easier on second.

We top rope another possible line, but the gear is non-existent and we didn't bring a drill up. Our enthusiasm gets dampened along with the rock when it starts to rain, so we go for a walk to look at future options.

We find dozens of potential lines, and two partially-bolted projects by someone with larger forearms and loftier ambitions. The clouds darken and the rain returns... then the hail... so we drive back to Melbourne, having done 8 hours of driving for 3 pitches of climbing.

I'll do it again as soon as Matt forgets how little climbing was actually involved, or I find someone else equally suggestible.

NEW ROUTES

On the Stelae 3m East of the Chimney Pots tourist track (right hand branch):

Inpalation (8m 16) follows an obvious crack in the upper block, pulling through the bulge on the left. FA M. Dunwoodie, A. Cuskelly 2017

Stela (20m 18*) heads straight up the middle of the lower block via a series of intermittent cracks.

FA A. Cuskelly, M. Dunwoodie 2017

An additional line left of Stela has been top roped (20m 22) and will likely be bolted at some stage in the future.

NZ Backcountry Skiing Adventures

By: Luke Frisken

CAR TROUBLES AND DOBSON

Friday morning, the roads were clear, and it was time for us to make our getaway! Unfortunately the chances of us making a hill start on the ice in the yard seemed remote. Luckily there were friendly people on the property to help us jump start the car, and tow us out through the snow to the road, where we had to once again push start the car for reasons I can't remember!

The weather was stunning, we headed back over the pass towards Christchurch and down to Lake Tekapo. We were expecting widespread natural avalanches in the Cragieburn Range due to a big dump on top of the facets that we'd seen on our trip up to Cheeseman. Instead we headed down south, chasing better, and safer, backcountry conditions. We decided to do a short tour in the Two Thumb Range near Mt Dobson. The other car group had to make a detour to Christchurch to drop off Shree, who had injured his knee skiing on a tussock in Flock Hill.

My thoughts were that we could camp somewhere just near the trailhead for Camp Stream hut. Little did we know, this was actually still private property, and not part of the reserve! It was

very late by the time we arrived, and the road was firm and a bit icy. We didn't have snow chains for our car (a big mistake, we decided due to lack of time not to procure them in Christchurch). I was skeptical that we would even be able to start again as we did a u-turn and parked on the side of the road at the top of a little hill leading down to a bridge. We were too tired to think clearly, jumped out and put up our tent.

In the morning we were woken up by a loud diesel tractor engine, and a door slam. "You fellas alive in there"? shouted a friendly voice over the motor. A few mumbles as we woke up served as an answer. Again the friendly voice: "It was -11C last night, you must be cold"! and this time I replied "We have warm sleeping bags, so we're alright"! "I just need you fellas to move your car, it's in the way of the snow plow, oh and by the way you're camped on my land", oh dear what a mistake "Sorry sorry! we got confused"! "That's okay, but I do need you to move your car". We sheepishly crawled out of the tent and made our way over to the car. This was all the more embarrassing, having a good idea of what was to come when we tried start the car.

The key turned and the motor hardly made a sound. The look of incredulity grew on the farmer's

face, "I'm sorry we have a flat battery! We'll have to hill start it".

We gave the car a push, but the tires slipped, and the engine wouldn't turn. We ended up getting into position to block the bridge. The single lane road was the only way in or out of the area, a terrible place to fail to push start! The man found a rope in his tractor and pulled us backwards to attempt a backwards pull start, but again the tires lacked the traction required. He jumped out, and walked over, the look of incredulity magnified. "You've got jumper leads"? "No, sorry". He grumbled about pulling tourists out of his property and that his cables were with his car, drove off with his tractor to collect his car.

As he sets up for the jump start he asked us some more questions. "So this is all very well, but you've got snow chains don't you"? A couple of grins and head shakes. Ah yeah, and the battery, it's been like that the whole trip" Sam helpfully added. Now he really thought we were goofs (which we were)! He grinned and said "Look, you guys look like you should know what you're doing but fucking hell, to come here without snow chains, and with a dead battery, that's crazy"! He couldn't believe how silly we were. We all agreed, and he sent us on our way.

In Tekapo we quickly found an auto repair shop to source a new battery and some snow chains. It was getting close to mid-day and we didn't feel like driving back to Roundhill, so we decided to head on over to Dobson. On the drive up, we put our newly acquired snow chains on, and the road steepened, another spectacular

road to another spectacular New Zealand ski field. Prompted by the advice from a staff member who passed us on the drive up, we parked at a large clearing down the road from where the long line of cars began, near where a cat track met the road. It felt so good to be able to turn the engine off and know that it

would turn on again without any fuss. We were excited, while we munched on lunch we prepared our gear for the day's ski.

The first run was up to the peak at the south end of the ridge from Dobson Peak, with the weather station on top. We stuck to the low angled slope, picking our way. Out of interest we dug



PHOTO BY: LUKE FRISKEN
SKIING AT MT DOBSON

a west-facing snow pit, on a small section, with a maximum steepness of more than 30 degrees. I forgot to record our observations or the avalanche forecast for that day, from what I can remember, the danger was ranging from moderate to considerable. We were happy with the result from that slope. Turning around before the slope got steeper, we had a great run back to the car before walking up the cat track to the ski field buildings, where all the crowds were located.

The ski patroller we talked to gave us a sideways glance and began to interrogate us. “Why are you here so late”? “ah, long story”. “Do you have beacons and probes”? etc etc. He seemed skeptical, but eventually gave us some advice about a route up, and on our planned route to make a circuit back to the car. While traversing beneath

Dobson Peak on the south side on what is usually a cat track (when there’s no snow), I decided to pull out the shovel again. There was a fair bit of new snow here, quite a lot of it collected in drifts. We were considering coming down from the peak at a similar aspect so it was a good opportunity to see what was going on. We discarded the possibility of skiing the south side of Dobson peak out of our minds, and we continued over to the top of the chairlift on the south side.

Afterwards, we ran into our skeptical ski patroller again. He seemed a little surprised about our snow report and thanked us, but did not consider the results unexpected, saying that there had been a slide on this same slope before (taking out a cat machine or something if I recall correctly?). Considering how many people were walking across

it, perhaps it was stable, but having that many people testing it didn’t seem like the greatest idea to me! And so we continued on our traverse of the ridge line to end, up at the weather station above our car. The wind was picking up, and we sought shelter behind an old fridge (what the heck was a fridge doing up here?) while we took our skins off. Julian struck a rock with his skis on the way down, but apart from that, it was an exciting and fun descent.

SKIING AT MT DOBSON

Back at the car, I knew something was up when the central locking didn’t work. “That’s strange”! I turned the key in the ignition, no response. Hands to the headlight control, and indeed the dial was switched to on. Why hadn’t the beeper warned me when we turned the car off? An unreliable warning is much worse than no

PHOTO BY: LUKE FRISKEN
SOMEONE MANAGED TO DRIVE OFF THE ROAD



PHOTO BY: LUKE FRISKEN
BUMMED ABOUT THE CAR SITUATION



warning at all! So there we were, in a pickle again. I'm sure the others though I was the silliest person in the world, being stuck there with a dead battery once again for the second time today. We tried to flag down passing cars as they left the ski field. Nobody had jumper cables. Even the patroller passed us by, smiling smugly as if to say "Hah! I knew all along, you are a bunch of fools"! Faced with the prospect of spending yet another cold night out next to our car with an embarrassing wake up we opted to attempt a roll start, we had the entire mountain after all!

As exciting as driving down a mountain with no power steering can be, I was pretty drained by the time we rolled onto the flat, all our restart attempts being unsuccessful. One by one the cars trickled past us, each shaking their heads in answer to our questions. Finally, the last car stopped next to us. A dark 4WD van. A friendly a crew with accents belonging to many countries, they were on a ski holiday together. The driver said

they might have something for us, and pulled out an old looking jumper lead, which fell apart while handling it! "Better than nothing"! we said, overjoyed. A few minutes later, with power streaming into the battery I tried turning the key, but nothing happened! Not a sound, not a light flickered, nothing!

Once again, the van crew came to our aid, they fished around in the back of their vehicle and discovered a rather thin looking nylon strap, and decided they could pull us to Fairlie, the nearest town. The sun by this stage, had well and truly set. Without functioning lights, we stuck our head torches in red mode in the boot, and signalled for the pulling to begin. As we rounded perhaps the third corner, the steering wheel suddenly locked, and the car lurched suddenly into the ditch filled with snow, and began climbing the slope above. We all screamed our heads out the window "STOP STOP"! Eventually someone must have noticed our plight, because we rolled to a stop. I was so thankful that the car had decided to head left, up the hill, rather than right, down the hill!

After some head scratching, and a few times turning the ignition on and off again, the steering appeared appeared to regain function and we were on our way again, with a lot more caution! Our new friends deposited us in Fairlie and continued on their way up to Fox Peak where they were spending the night, even offering to take us there to join them, but we insisted on staying in Fairlie to get our car fixed sooner.

STUCK IN FAIRLIE

Major frustration. We had landed ourselves with a weathered, cranky mechanic who didn't have the skills to fix the problem with our car. He was waiting on his auto electrician who was sick. We would be stuck in Fairlie yet another day! He did drop a little hint about it being related to the immobilizer. So I did some searching on the internet and figured out we could probably disable it if we looked for the method in the manual. Sure enough, the incantation instructions required was right there in the glovebox!

TURNING TRAITOR

By: Robert Springer

A while ago I was asked to make a map of the Indi River; my immediate reply: "I don't think I'll be able to double check the information is correct, so making that map might take a while". What was actually going through my head at the time was: "If I'm gonna be drowning myself why not do it in a nice warm bathtub"?

I blissfully ignored the existence of that river.

Fast forward six months or so: It's a week before the Snowy River Extreme Race and a couple of our friends from Monash (#bringbackwilde) invited me to join them on a couple of rivers starting the Thursday before the race. Normally this wouldn't be a huge issue. Leave Melbourne early, sleep at the put in and then kayak the next day, but I have the C grade canoe finals to go to... after a good thrashing loss of 2:8, Paul and I were ready to leave Brunswick.

Bushwalkers think that leaving at 7pm is late (eg midnight ascent); dirtbag climbers don't get up until late in the morning (no sense climbing while the rock is still freezing). Mountaineers go to bed early and wake up early.

Monash kayakers burn the candle from both ends. They leave Brunswick at 11pm for a 7 hour drive before a super early start for a wilderness river and hey, also my first serious grade 4 river, why not make things extra exciting?

We got to Geehi flats at 5am, just before sunrise. I took a power nap in the car and at 8am we were packed and ready to go. The walk down to the Indi was a killer. In the future I'd rather do a 3km flatwater paddle at the start, than carry a loaded kayak down 2km to the river. Walking back up to help other people carry their boats down was definitely a big highlight of the day.

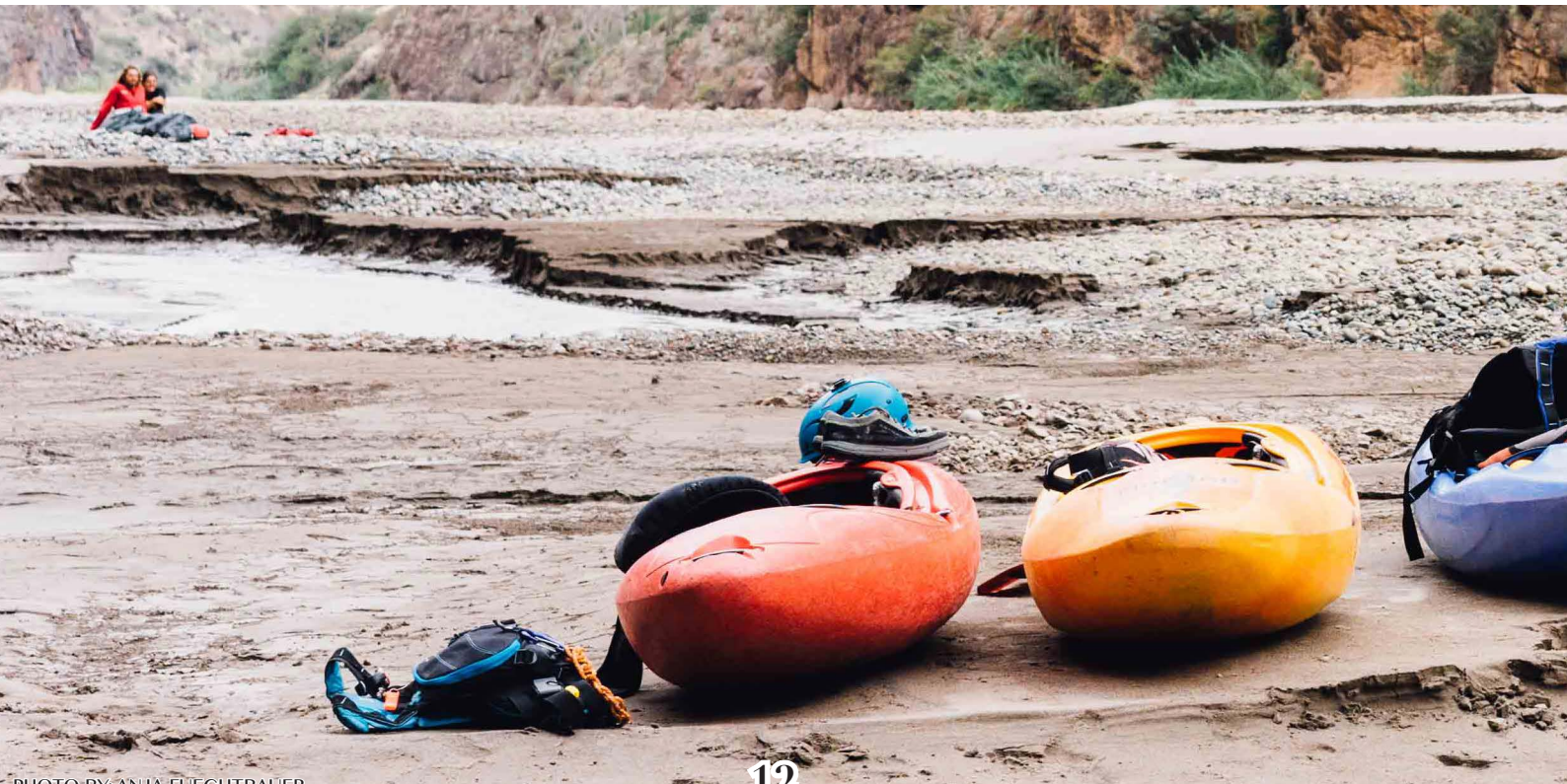
At the put in everybody laughed at my packing choices. I wondered, why? 2L of orange juice and a can of baked beans as river snacks were a perfectly normal food choice.

The Indi was at a lower level (0.85 at Biggara) so the run was pretty chill with plenty of time for eddies and nice eddies (this included the one I floated in, mid-rapid, watching the others portage, while I ate my can of baked beans).

I had fun with a heavily loaded boat, with the highlight being an almost mystery move in the creekboat when I hit a very aerated patch of water and sunk deep.

After a dinner at the Khancoban Pub - \$14 all you can eat salad bar - we drove on to Thredbo and had a nice early night- bed at 1am.

Apparently tomorrow we'll paddle the Eucumbene.





FIRST DESCENTS

By: Robert Springer

It's been a few years since MUMC explored a new river. The most recent documented first descent by MUMC was the upper East Kiewa Rocky Valley Branch (Mountaineer, Sept 2003).

After attempting to paddle the Caledonia River I read about that in a later Mountaineer I found someone who wasn't fully jaded by my attempts to paddle the "unpaddleable". The two other people who expressed interest in joining, flaked out, hours before we left.

We woke up at 7am at Jokers Flat. A bit late but "She'll be all right". When we got to the Bundara Bridge we were disappointed by the distinct lack of water, "nah, yeah, nah".

Driving along to Anglers Rest we met another couple of kayakers who told us that the Bundara would come up a bit with snow melt during the day. So we decided to give it a crack.

At this point I was trying to decide whether to take-out at the top of the farmland or at the normal put-in of the Bundara. Tom, on the other hand, was wondering if we should park at the Bundara Bridge or at the Hinnomunjie Bridge. We obviously had wildly varying expectations of the difficulty of this river. We settled for the Bundara Bridge.

At 10:00 we got to Trapyard Gap, and

by 10:30 we were packed and are on our way. 1.5 km walk in. Down hill. Via scrub.

We had a quick discussion on bail out options. Tom wanted to walk out. I knew the scrub and slope and decided I'd rather remove my toenails one by one with a blunt rusty rescue knife and have packed accordingly. My boat was heavy but at least it'll auto-boof.

After getting dragged downhill by my boat I decided to let it slide. It was both good and bad. Now, at least I didn't need to keep holding the boat. On the flip side I now had to use the most recent sound of the boat hitting a tree to find out where it had ended up.

After having Tom's boat launch clear over my head we decided that it was a pity that he wasn't at the front with the camera.

A machete would have been nice to help clear the deer trail a bit more.....

We got to the river at noon. It could have done with more water but I was happy I'd get more time to eddy out before any scary drops.

Off we went. Continuous grade 3 roller coasters. Horizon line after horizon line and almost all of the lines were clean and easy to scout

from the boat. Should have taken Jalapeño (the axiom) instead of George (the Villain S). Highlights included Death Star-an amazing 4m drop where you chose between a face smashing chute into a munchy hole, or a sketchy slide into aforesaid hole.

There was also Captain Munch, where you had a choice of pinning central or sliding into a nice hole. It was a bit "how ya going"?

After about 2 hours of paddling we reached the first pool and had lunch-roast chicken.

Then, after another couple of grade 3 drops the river slowed down. The next hour greeted us with gentle grade 2, the stench of cow poo, electric fences and cows mooing in consternation at these strange colourful logs floating down the river.

After an hour of flatwater paddling (and an awkward vertical pin by me), we came across another group just before the usual put-in for the Bundarra.

Tom decided to bail at this stage sore arms I joined the other group on the lower Bundara, turns out, the upper section is quite tame. All in all, a good summary would be: "Shit, you bagged a classic" a guy on Facebook.

Honorary Life Members

2018

By: Dan Andreasen-Cocker

The club has many members who put in countless hours for the functioning of the club. Life Membership is a great recognition of those who have gone above and beyond in service for the club. In nominating both Mitch and Richard, both past presidents of the club who have taken on this role of responsibility have made significant contributions to the club.

The written guidelines for life membership is in the constitution:
“The Association, by a three-quarters majority at a general meeting, may admit to Life Membership any person whom it considers to be a distinguished mountaineer, or whose association with the Association would be a benefit to it, or on whom the Association wishes to bestow a mark of appreciation in reward for services”.

Mitchell Stephen

Mitchell Stephen joined MUMC in 2010 as a first year student and right from that moment it was clear that he was a person of passion and purpose. Throughout his time at the club, Mitch has been a consistent and active member, although this activity in the last couple of years has been much more in the background.

Mitch's involvement has been characterized by an unwavering dedication to the club and he has been one of the key members for the club's survival and continued growth. Mitch was elected to the MUMC committee in 2010. He served on the committee holding a number of positions, including: Bushwalking Convener, Canoe Polo Convener, Paddling Officer, General Member and President. Five terms on the committee is well above many members time in the club let alone commitment to serving the club.

In 2012 Mitch was first elected to the Melbourne University Sport Association (MUSA), as the Off Campus and Water Sports Representative. In 2017 he was elected as vice president of the organization.

As President, Mitch played a crucial role in ensuring the ongoing health of the club through a period of substantial change. Prior to Mitch taking

on the presidents role the club had been negotiating for new clubrooms without success. The initial offerings of new clubrooms from MU Sport were inferior and it took extensive negotiations at multiple levels to get the outcome of the current clubrooms. He took the negotiations above and beyond, networking at the University to achieve the outcome. The current clubrooms have been a great boon for the club; Mitch and Richard undertook an extensive fit out of the clubrooms, changing them from a day surgery facility into a functional and inviting space. They are no longer just a functional storage area but also a social space which has significantly increased member activity beyond trips.

The contacts and relationships that Mitch created and fostered through MU Sport and MUSA proved to be of great use to the club in the aftermath of the disastrous events of 2015. The

club faced the very real prospect of being forced to close by withdrawal of university support, and our affected members needed help and assistance. As we continue to work towards recommencing rope sports their positive relationships remain essential.

It is common for longer-term members to serve on the committee for a period and then step away from responsibility; Mitch however has stayed active in club management behind the scenes, showing a significant level of commitment to the club. This is something I have relied on when dealing with MU Sport and the University.

Mitch further demonstrated this commitment following the passing of Stuart Hollaway and Dale Thistlethwaite. All the members of the club executive as well as other long term club members were away in New Zealand when news of their

accident broke. Mitch stepped up and managed media requests after the devastating news, he contacted friends and family of Dale and Stu to make sure all interviews and statements were to their wishes. He followed this up with speaking on MUMC's

behalf at the memorial service. During this time he took on these duties and executed them with excellent communication and compassion during a tragic time for the club. Recently in 2017, Mitch was also appointed as the student member

representative for the Board of Sport, however he hasn't been in this role long enough to advocate for our club.



Richard Bassett-Smith

Richard Bassett-Smith has been an enthusiastic motivating member since 2009 and in his time in the club has excelled across all sports. His considerable enthusiasm for welcoming new members and encouraging people of all abilities to tackle their next goal has helped boost membership and participation in the club.

The new home of MUMC on Berkeley Street has become a great hub of activity and much of this can be credited to Richard's involvement.

PHOTO BY: ANJA FUECHTBAUER
RICHARD ON A KAYAKING TRIP DOWN
THE MARAÑÓN RIVER IN PERÚ



Although this is no MUMC hut, it is a significant commitment. For well over a year he effectively worked a second job-tirelessly designing, sourcing materials, constructing and supervising-as the shell of a day surgery facility was transformed into the space that we now call home.

The works began with creating efficient and secure gear storage, which enabled 24 hour access for BSAR searches. Subsequent projects included the bouldering

wall, library, presentation space and remodeled kitchen. This work has been central to the surge in activity outside Tuesday evenings as a place to hang out, study, boulder or plan an adventure. No other club enjoys the privileges of a space like ours; Richard has never been short of ideas to improve the club, just short of time to execute them.

Richard's contribution to club facilities goes well beyond the current clubrooms. He has had a sustained involvement with the maintenance of the club's hut on Mt Feathertop and has developed a long-term maintenance works plan.

Richard has served four terms on committee and has continued to be active with club deliberations outside these appointments; he has served as vice president, president and two terms as a general member. His strong leadership was critical to the survival of the club following the disastrous events of 2015. His actions to push for greater support from the university helped the club and its members in their recovery.

These events galvanized the need for robust and well documented policies and procedures. Richard and myself have led the process of collecting, refining and streamlining MUMC's safety management systems into a logical series of documents that is unparalleled in similar clubs.

Richard has started work to protect the club's history, he began a process of digitizing and protecting club records. It was his initiative to scan past editions of The Mountaineer and has contacted past OXOs in search of older copies that have been lost from the archives.

Of the current active club members Richard is the most accomplished mountaineer. Although he would be the last to boast about it. His last adventure with Stu Hollaway was a first ascent of the Hidden Balfour face of Rarakiroa Mt Tasman, named One Longer Day (NZ6-) in 2015. Another first ascent with Stu was Endeavor (NZ6-) on Aoraki Mt Cook in 2013. These are big burly routes, the scale of which are infrequently climbed in New Zealand. This is in addition to numerous other notable ascents in the New Zealand Southern Alps and adventures further afield in central Asia and South America.



THE 4 BEST FRIENDS TO HAVE ON A SKI TRIP

By: Anna Detmold
Co-Author: Guillaume Stanguennec

PHOTO BY: LUKE FRISKEN
MUMC CREW ON AST-1 COURSE

We all love skiing sick lines, but your ski trip can only reach its highest high if you're surrounded by the right people. Right here we've got the low down on the best 4 types of skiers to bring on your next trip out.

PHOTO BY: ANNA DETMOLD



1

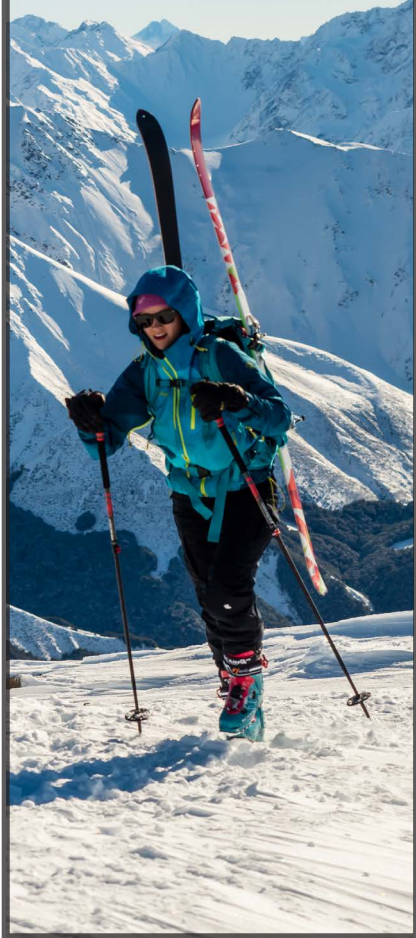
THE PHOTOGRAPHER

This friend is a nature photographer, one who occasionally takes pictures of people. Usually found somewhere in the outdoors, will stop at nothing to get the perfect shot. This skiing buddy is determined to coax authentic smiles and capture candid moments. This friend won't put the camera down for anything...except cheese. While this friend is passionate about photography and treats his camera like a newborn child he is also passionate about dehydrated mashed potatoes and is good at boosting his non-camera-owning friend's morale in the mountains.

2

THE SKI GANGSTER

PHOTO BY: GUILLAUME STANGUENNEC



“SNOW MAKES ME SOO HAPPY”!!

This skier takes pride in their long skiing career-the inordinate length of time they’ve been skiing for. They’ll always be psyched about skiing, no matter what. Their energy is contagious. Well-versed in the art of making igloos, snowmen and snowball fights.

This skier does an amazing job at boosting group morale. This friend is stoked ALL the time-especially when everyone else is curled up in their down sleeping bags drinking a cup of tea. This skier does an amazing job of boosting group morale.

3

THE TRAVEL AGENT

PHOTO BY: GUILLAUME STANGUENNEC



Her skiing is clean and tongue is sharp. If negotiation is required to get you out of jail or simply to get a refund off your dodgy rental car, you can count on her. Let her be your friend but certainly not your enemy; tough on herself and will only ask for help when the pain is...unbearable, careful helping her... might result in your own injury. Although a natural introvert, she is a good negotiator and coordinator.

This friend can be serious when tasks need to get done, however, she can also channel their inner prankster.

4

THE ORGANISED ONE

PHOTO BY: GUILLAUME STANGUENNEC



“I THOUGHT PLANNING WAS AN ACCEPTABLE HOBBY”

This skier has acquired two maps for every place that you dream of skiing. It does not matter if you actually plan to ski in these areas, this friend has you covered and is always one step ahead. This friend excels in efficient supermarket shopping. They have memorised the layout of common supermarkets to take the best route every time. Not only is this friend organized, they have their shit together and know how to fix Dynafit bindings like a pro.

If your Dynafit bindings ever need fixing call +61477055195.

12

A P O S T L E S



Words and Photos By: Richard Bassett-Smith

The ridge has been travelled, some pink marker tape has been scattered and the track is often semi-defined. But it is also easy to lose what path you happen to have found and end up making a new line through the wild vegetation. The speed of travel slows as you pick your way through the Supplejack, Kiekie or the great old trees which have fallen amongst the fractured limestone underfoot. A path is regained and the southeasterly winds pleasantly moderate your body's temperature.

Divergence is also necessary to find an Apostle and once you do, you might be in the high ground but visibility is still five to ten meters, at best. Scaling trees becomes a practiced skill as it allows you to grasp a glimpse of the coast, the township and the mountains of Aoraki and Tasman on the far horizon.

The Apostles fall steadily, seven hours in, only one remains but everything changes from that

point on. The scrub becomes truly wild, the Kiekie is intertwined with Supplejack-before, you could work your way around; there is no longer that option.

So now, wading through deep bush, and crawling on your hands and knees are sometimes possible. To your surprise there is a piece of pink marker tape in the most unlikely of places, left long ago. Otherwise balancing across the tops, a full body height up would be your only way through.

Desperation begins, a fight is well underway, with the twelfth apostle having fallen and the ocean so close, the challenge of finding a way forward has become just about impossible; be it the ground falling away with no warning, floundering in Kiekie or picking through a fishnet weave of Supplejack. The ocean rumbling fades away before strengthening. Lost once more. You drop down, trying to lose elevation but the altimeter reading gets no better.

A brief view might open up to find you've travelled too far west, realigned once more to find yourself creeping back west led by the vegetation. You no longer care where you end up, you just hope to find the coastal circuit track. Dropping all height, the ground flattens but the growth is even thicker with vegetation which you can't even peer through-the lower half leaf-less and the tops abundant with green. No way past but to go over these three-meter-high walls.

Point Elizabeth, eleven hours, one minute and three seconds. Approximately 10km of wild ridgeline from the quarry at grey river bridge via the twelve apostles to the far point. Not to mention it's another 10km or so home or via the road. I had taped an intentions form to my door and had told one other but everyone seemed to know where I had been when I came home. They were surprised I had pulled it off.



A STORY ABOUT CONFIDENCE, FUN & BEER

By: Anja Fuechtbauer

PHOTO BY: JOEY SCARR
VIEW FROM SWEET DREAMS (14)



**“I DON’T WANT TO FALL”.
– CLIMBER.**

**“I DON’T WANT TO SWIM”.
– PADDLER.**

**“I DON’T WANT TO CRY”.
– WOMAN.**

PHOTO BY: ANTHONY CUSKELLY
ANJA CONQUERING THE HEAD GAME AT SOFT PARADE

Maybe you too have had these thoughts before? On the odd occasion when you made that desperate move well above your last piece of gear. Or that time, when you were in a whirlwind of white-water and not sure if you’d make it down in one piece. We have probably all had those thoughts. But what if those thoughts start to appear every single time you go outdoors? What if they define your whole experience? They make you clench your teeth and bite your nails? When you are driving out on a Friday night, instead of looking forward to your adventure you wonder if you will fall, if you will swim or if you will end up crying? These thoughts often arise because you lack confidence and don’t believe in yourself or in your skills and abilities

The excerpt on the left is the start to an article I wrote about four weeks ago- when the confidence in my skills was basically non-existent. I was desperate to understand why I had gone from absolutely loving the outdoors and challenging myself to almost being afraid to go outdoors and sleep in a tent. I held myself to very high standards. Let me explain. Two years ago, I was a confident lead-climber. Nudging on 20s on sport lead outdoors, entering bouldering competitions and I was generally strong and fit. Then I injured my wrist and it's been average ever since. Climbing has been completely off limits since, bike riding was gone too and I couldn't even open a door knob without being in pain. Stand still.

Kayaking: somehow I could still do it, so I threw myself into it. I went to NZ Kayak School that year and again earlier this year. After returning from NZ in February I had an awesome day at the whitewater stadium in Penrith. I was stoked. I managed so many rolls and did heaps of "cool" stuff. I taught others. After that, no more kayaking really. A trip to Peru followed, where I

rafted the Marañón River. There, I beat myself up for not being a good enough kayaker for a trip of a lifetime. Upon my return to Australia in August I tried to go surf kayaking. It was small surf. I didn't even get out to the waves, just got stuck in the whitewash. I tumbled. Got dragged around and I swam. Then walked along the beach crying. I taught others how to roll a kayak successfully. I went to kayak school twice! What the hell was going on? I was so disappointed in myself. A further trip to Penrith (the only other whitewater running in this part of town this that of year) when I tried to roll in the outwash of the last rapid before heading up to the top of the course, I swam again. And I beat myself up so much mentally, not physically. Tears coming down my cheeks, I paddled over to the lake grimly to practise my roll.

At the same time, I started to go back to climbing. On a trip to the Blue Mountains I worked up the courage to say yes to an 'easy' lead climb. I made it to the last clip and then bailed before the anchor. Instead of being ecstatic to have pushed for the last clip when I felt so awfully terrified,

I felt like I had failed. I mean it wouldn't have been a 'hard' climb for two-years-ago-climber-me, a 16. But I felt shattered. The things I used to be so proud of all seemed to have vanished. So, self-reflection; here we go. Sit down to ask 'why' and try to get the fun back from being in the outdoors. Because instead of properly enjoying the beautiful afternoon on the rock with my friends, my brain and emotions just spun out of control.

There was a rational reason for all the things that were going on. Namely, I haven't climbed in two years which means no physical strength training, no exposure to leading and particularly no training for my head game. All climbers know that if you lose your head game, you should probably call it a day, just go to the pub for a beer and come back another day. We all have those days when we are just not up for it. And that's OK! Kayaking is very similar. It's mighty helpful to be confident. Daan from kayak school used to say "either you own your kayak or it owns you". You need to actively drive your boat to get where you want. Confidently. The crux in kayaking, in my opinion,





is a bomber roll. If you can roll up anytime, then your kayaking improves by a gazillion percent.

Surrounding yourself with super awesomely talented friends who make everything look easy and are more ballsy than you can be great. But it can also trigger feelings of inadequacy and make you feel like you are the one that holds others back. Or you head out with people who have started at the same time as you but they are further ‘ahead’ (hint: there’s no ‘ahead’ in having a good time) because they kept at the sport or maybe didn’t get injured. The truth is, these friends are actually just super stoked for you to give it a go and get out with them after a hiatus from the sport. Half the time, they might just fake their braveness anyway.

And despite it all, somehow, last weekend I competed, well participated in a whitewater kayaking race. On a grade III section of on icy cold river. Happily. And I swam. And I had a fantastic time. Like super-duper-awesome-making-me-smile-right-now time. And the weekend before the race I climbed in the Blue Mountains and lead two pitches on a climb called Sweet Dreams – a 10 and a 13. It was great.

So why all this rambling? Injury, parenthood, change of interest or moving city / town and traveling can all be factors that get you away from your training routine. Maybe for quite a while. When you get lucky and re-discover your love for your sport – and go back, and you are on the competitive spectrum of personalities, something like this might happen. Hopefully, you don’t beat yourself up about it. So how did I get back to being a noob, ‘failing’ and actually having fun while doing so?

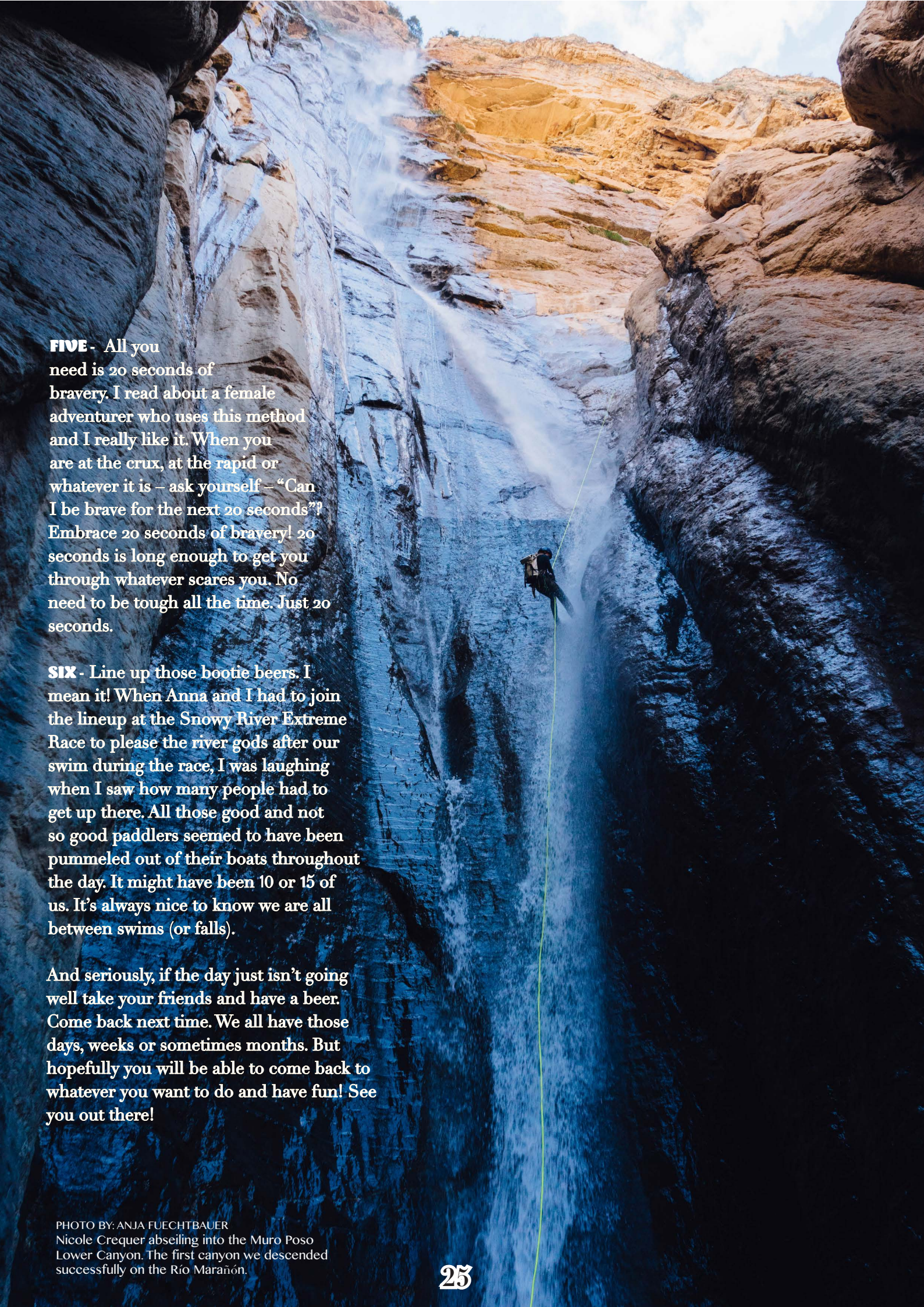
ONE -An article I read said ask ‘what’ instead of ‘why’. It is a far more positive way to look at things. “Why am I bad at kayaking”? Because I lack confidence and I haven’t paddled etc. You end up feeling like a failure. Rather ask: “What do I not like about my kayaking”? That I can’t roll. So, work on it!

TWO - Back to basics. Step back and start easy. Do a multi-pitch but maybe let your partner lead the harder pitches. You still get to do the whole thing and can relax seconding the hard moves. And do ‘pretend-lead’ and/or lead in the gym. In kayaking go back to video analysis of rolling in flat water. Get those chicken-wings sorted. Get your friends to push

you over. Hold your breath for 5, 10, 15, 20 seconds before you roll. Take your goggles with you and your nose plug. You know, pretend you’re back at kayak school. And allow yourself to fail.

THREE - Choose things you are good at. For me this meant to go on a multi pitch climb in which I swapped the ‘hard’ pitches with someone else. And we took someone out who was completely new to outdoor climbing. I know how to setup systems safely and I got to share a whole lot of (basic) outdoor climbing knowledge. It made me feel really confident and competent about an important aspect of climbing.

FOUR - Take those friends who are on the same emotional wavelength out. We all know people that are awesome at the sport they do but they might not be emotionally tuned in with you or just not a good teacher. Maybe go with them next time and choose someone that you can take it easy with and don’t feel like you need to prove anything to them. If you are a woman, an all-girls trip can be a good idea too. Sorry, not sorry, lads.

A full-page background photograph showing a person rappelling down a massive, multi-tiered waterfall. The waterfall is surrounded by steep, layered rock walls of a canyon. The water is white and turbulent as it falls. The person is a small figure in the middle of the frame, suspended by a rope. The lighting is bright, highlighting the textures of the rock and the spray of the water.

FIVE - All you need is 20 seconds of bravery. I read about a female adventurer who uses this method and I really like it. When you are at the crux, at the rapid or whatever it is – ask yourself – “Can I be brave for the next 20 seconds”? Embrace 20 seconds of bravery! 20 seconds is long enough to get you through whatever scares you. No need to be tough all the time. Just 20 seconds.

SIX - Line up those bootie beers. I mean it! When Anna and I had to join the lineup at the Snowy River Extreme Race to please the river gods after our swim during the race, I was laughing when I saw how many people had to get up there. All those good and not so good paddlers seemed to have been pummeled out of their boats throughout the day. It might have been 10 or 15 of us. It’s always nice to know we are all between swims (or falls).

And seriously, if the day just isn’t going well take your friends and have a beer. Come back next time. We all have those days, weeks or sometimes months. But hopefully you will be able to come back to whatever you want to do and have fun! See you out there!

PHOTO BY: ANJA FUECHTBAUER
Nicole Crequer abseiling into the Muro Poso Lower Canyon. The first canyon we descended successfully on the Río Marañón.



PHOTO BY: MATT DUNWOODIE
SAM THOMPSON ABSEILING AND SELF-LIGHTING
DOWN "THE BIG AVEN", IRONSTONE CAVE.

GAINING SOME EXPERIENCE

By: Anon

The look on Javier's face was new. It told Martin and I that we were watching him have his first truly dirty experience. It was obvious that this was the first time he had gotten so covered in brown, smelly and sticky stuff while thrusting his way up to Alexa. He had a look of effort but enjoyment as Alexa was breathing heavier and heavier, clearly having the time of her life.

Martin and I watched on, enjoying the spectacle of limbs moving in weird and wonderful ways unfold before us. Legs trying to find purchase on the wall to get better leverage, more ideal positions to get deeper and deeper. As holes began to tighten the need for lubrication to continue moving became more evident. Javier's large, rigid form slowing in the tightened tube. He struggled to continue, he was so close.

Suddenly Alexa pulled away and Javier exited the hole. Leaning over, face down, hips up Alexa showed Javier the next hole, urging him on. He pushed in bending over to find the right angle to slide his long, excited form into the new hole with minimal friction. This time Alexa was close to getting there almost immediately. She thrust and

squirmed. Heaved and panted as they continued, Martin and I soon to join them.

The four of us moved in sync, beads of sweat forming as we pushed in further. Everyone delighting in the experience but wanting to make it to the finish. And then, as if we were in a line we made it Alexa; tensing as she crossed the threshold. Javier; grunting as he made it. Martin; falling with relief and I was wet but satisfied when I finally made it. We had reached the open passage after pushing through tight tunnels near the entrance of the cave.

Caving has so many aspects; abseils, climbs, crawls, traverses and finally squeezes. The squeezes in Buchan's caves are small and can be long before you reach open passage and wonderful formations. As this was Alexa's first caving experience we took her through a mix of everything including some very tight squeezes. The one she and Javier went through while Martin and I watched on is called the love tunnel or rabbit run in Slocombs cave. It was where Alexa and Javier first got hot, sweaty and up nice and close thus it is only fitting other club members can learn how to cave from the experience Javier and Alexa shared.

GUIDING & INSTRUCTION



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A woman in a blue helmet and green shirt is rappelling down a dark rock face. A blue rope is attached to her harness and extends down the rock. The background is a dense forest of green trees.

PHOTO BY: ANTHONY CUSKELLY
ANNA GETTING SOME AIR TIME
ON
BOOGIE TILL YOU PUKE (21)

FAILING

By:
Anna
Detmold

“When you fail, you fall. But failure is not a bad word. Failure is a symptom of pushing yourself to do what was previously impossible. So, we must celebrate the falls- and the bumps, bruises, and scars they produce-if we’re going to appreciate the true value of the results”.
-The North Face

I was just another case of “I’ll join the club to get into climbing”, but soon enough, I started building a flakey relationship with the river gods. I dabbled, dipping a timid toe into the cold water, only kayaking a few weekends a year. (I dabbled - in both senses of the word - by partially immersing my hands in water, and by kayaking, only a few weekends a year.) In part, this dabbling, a reluctance to properly commit, was a result of not fully coming to terms with failing (swimming), constantly dreading my next bootie beer (a necessary sacrifice to appease the river gods after a swim).

Kayaking fosters an intimate relationship with turbulent waters. However, at times, it gets a bit too intimate for my liking, especially when the water decides to be the clingy one in the relationship. There have been some holes that I’ve been stuck in that left me inclined to book a 2 pm appointment at the psychologist; maybe we needed to work on our relationship issues if this was going to work out. and also to swim, time and time again. Swimming can feel akin to failure in kayaking. Yes, those tough days, when nothing seems to go right have resulted in scratched hands, bruised legs and broken bones. Still, these bruises, cuts and bumps made me stronger, more determined to push myself even harder.



On to climbing...The first time I climbed outdoors it wasn't out of choice, but because I humored my brother who needed a belay buddy. He had been eager to climb one of the tallest monoliths in the world, La Peña de Bernal, for a while; just a three-hour drive from my house in Mexico City. While the route is an easy grade 16 multi-pitch, I had no outdoor climbing or lead-belay experience, just my brother's trust. I was positively surprised, I didn't fall off on a five-pitch outdoor 16...success is great isn't it? I derived a feeling of elation from this initial 'success'. However, I have also experienced the opposite feeling when faced with failure.

Last year, my brother asked me if I wanted to go climbing in Laos. I sheepishly said yes; I signed myself up for close to three weeks of outdoor climbing. I was

nervous at first. Laos consisted of a lot of falling...a lot of failing. Yet, the weird species known as climbers - often observed in the wild, perched on tall rock formations, characterized by their strong physique and low percentage body fat, who deprive their hands of skin and get their pants full of climber's cocaine - believe that if you aren't falling you aren't trying hard enough. Soon enough, I accepted that it was indeed this repetitive failure that eventually allowed me to build the courage, head-space and guts to climb stronger. It was then that I was able to see past the disadvantages of failure. For failure is indeed a false dichotomy- typically associated with frustration and negativity, yet, this dichotomy isn't all black and white. My head has slowly started to make changes, has learnt to appreciate small progressions in climbing, and

learnt that not finishing a route or swimming should not equate with failure. I have redefined my traditional notions of success and failure, this has enabled me to eliminate negativity from what I would have previously regarded as a failure. I no longer possess an insatiable need for success and have learnt to stop fixating on traditional notions of failure.

I must admit, there are still days that I am unable to stomach failure, however, I have come to realise that failing is to any outdoor sport what fuel is to a car. Failure and success are not opposites, they are a perfect match. We don't climb or paddle because it's easy, we climb and paddle because it's hard. We need to fall, we need to get wet. We need to avoid dwelling on failure, getting caught in the never-ending spiral of frustration, self-loathing and sulking.

EXPECTATION



MANAGEMENT

By: Aiden Elliott



PHOTO BY: CAITLYN CONWAY
MIDNIGHT ASCENT 2017

The weather forecast was 70km/h winds and heavy snow. There were mixed opinions depending on which OXO you asked. Some thought it was going to be an absolute cracker, some were resigned to another night of cold walking in the spirit of 'fun', others were downright apprehensive about the whole concept. One thing all the OXOs could agree upon though was that Midnight Ascent 2017 was going to be a mission.

We had 10 car groups with staggered leaving times between 2 pm and 7 pm. I was in a car with Kirra, Matt and Anna travelling up the Hume finally relaxing and swapping jokes after many hours of trip planning when I got the text from Guillaume; "Car broke, gearbox trashed, can't drive my team up". So much for a relaxing start to the trip! For the next half hour, Anna and I called different OXOs, looking for a car and getting mixed results. All while Kirra and Matt giggled

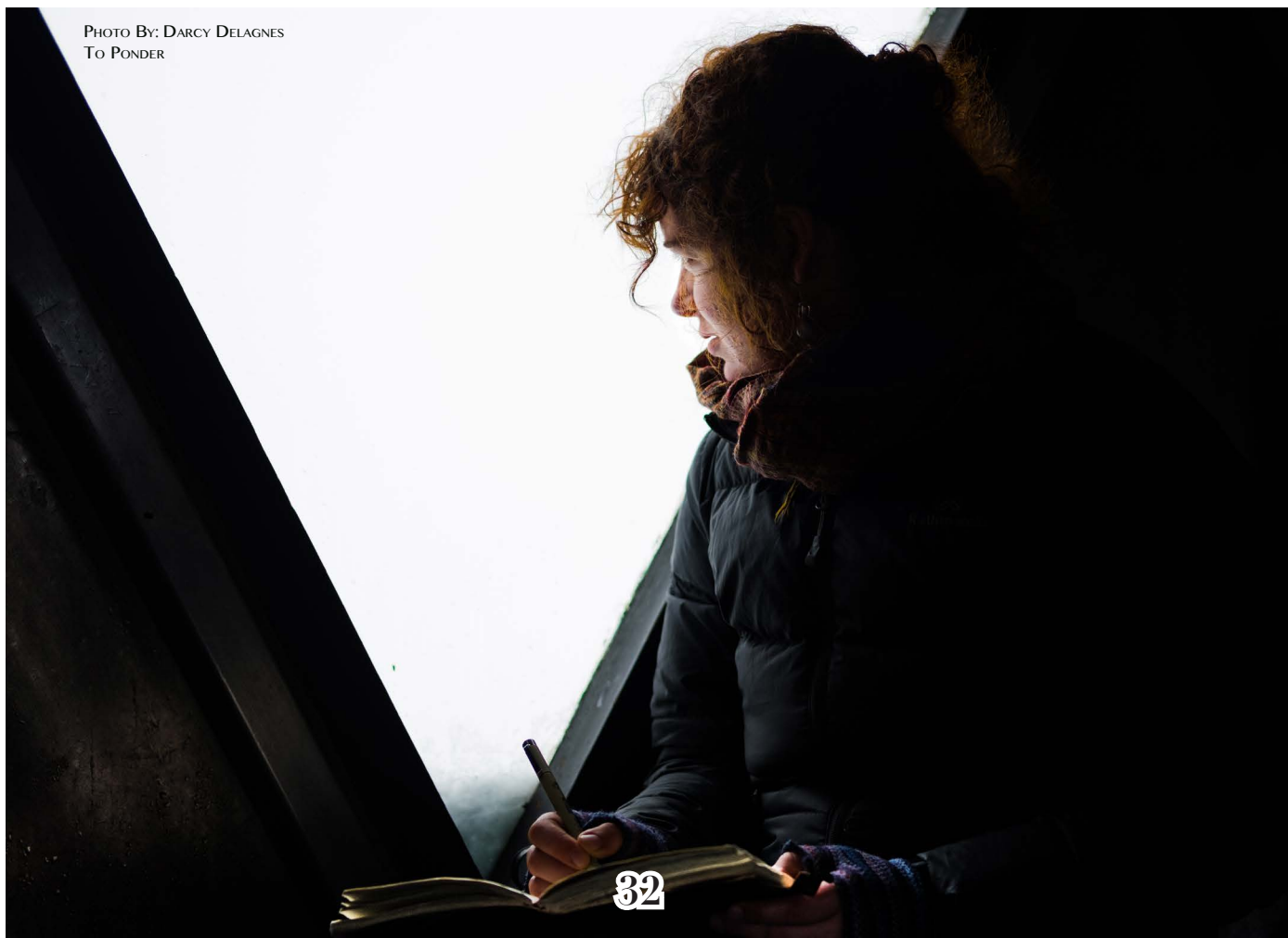
among themselves with each negative response we garnered! Finally, Anna was able to solve the problem. We had a car for Guillaume's group. They were going to be starting late but they were coming! A quick stop on the highway for kebabs where Matt and I appreciated the food donations from our less hungry companions, coupled with randomly ambushing strangers in the parking lot when we mistook them for other OXOs and we were back on the road to the trout farm.

We started walking just after 10 pm at which point Anna and I locked eyes upon realising we were not fit enough to keep up with the other two. Shortly after the river crossing we came across the group in front and decided to split up. Matt and Kirra swiftly disappeared into the mist while Anna and I teamed up with Evie to make a more elegant ascent of the mountain. And elegant it was! We reached the hut in 4 hours and promptly changed out

of our now soaking wet gear. After a quick head count, I realised at least 15 OXOs were still out there and arranged with Adele to be ready for them when they arrived. We snatched 20 minutes of restless sleep before the waves of car groups hit. For the next hour, Adele and I ferried OXOs from the wind into the wet change-out area before bundling them into bags and repeating. A particular highlight was Caio stomping through the door, giving me a massive hug of happiness to be out of the snow before promptly collapsing into sleep. Many a giggle occurred with that.

Just as the sun rose on another day the last OXO bar one, was accounted for. Caitlyn passed on that Luke had taken two OXOs back down the mountain who weren't feeling comfortable with the conditions. He was supposed to catch up with the last group but hadn't! Adele and I raised an eyebrow but we knew Luke and his skills and trusted he would

PHOTO BY: DARCY DELAGNES
TO PONDER





be fine. At around 8 am we were proven correct as Will, who had stepped out for a toilet break, walked back in to report Luke was outside enjoying the wind. Every OXO was in the hut and the party could start.

Rob rapidly assembled a game of 500 and after 15 minutes of attempting to explain the rules, gave up and swapped to bush rummy. (Much to my amusement as he had also tried and failed to teach me on the Western Arthurs the previous November). Another group was over by the cooking stoves sampling food and swapping stories. I and a handful of others dragged our bags together and watched proceedings while occasionally attempting small talk. After a well-timed nap, I woke up to an announcement from Mitch that we needed to change the toilet collective as it was full. Wanting nothing to do with this I rapidly volunteered myself as hut organiser and I wasn't short of hands as everyone else saw the opportunity to not play with shit for an hour.

Post toilet/hut cleaning everyone settled into food groups and began the annual challenge of making a three course meal from scratch with nothing but two camp stoves and a dream. Cooking was interrupted by the need to change into fancy dress for the photo shoot. After 5 minutes of faff, the photo was taken and everyone piled back in to finish the food. Mitch, the resident firefighter, had a stove malfunction which lead to two fire blankets being deployed, irony is amazing.

Nat outdid herself by making a mini hut Olympics challenge to keep everyone occupied throughout the early evening. There was an escape room, climbing challenge, bench traverse and ski traverse (bench traverse with snow gloves). Things slowly got louder as the drinking became more serious. Somewhere around 10 pm Caitlyn forgot about gravity and flung a goon sack off the second floor. Some OXOs were left with the classy smell of goon to keep them company when they slept on the floor that night. Max, Will and Mitch had decided to roast

a duck outside so some of us sat around the fire with soggy bottoms, enjoying the coals and waiting for Steve to turn another year older at midnight.

Sunday morning saw many slightly hungover OXOs being told they needed to flick into high gear and get off the mountain ASAP. There was a potential blizzard on the horizon and we needed to descend before it decided to say howdy. With the potential weather as an incentive, Anna and I had no issues keeping up with Matt and Kirra on the descent which we managed in 2 hours. (I'm taking this moment to apologise to my group as I set the goal of stacking it 12 times on the descent but only managed 8 plus falling into the river. I let the team down, I know).

Midnight Ascent was over for another year. It's probably just long enough for the next bushwalking officer to try and convince the OXO community that the gradient on Northwest actually is a good idea.

“Mate, Let’s Climb Alpha”

Alpha East Ridge,

AD- 5.7

Jack McCutchan, Alice
Butler, Tobias Huxol

It’s hard to ignore Alpha Mountain when you see the Tantalus Range in Squamish, rising up from sea level in the Howe Sound. It holds such a strong presence on the skyline that you can’t help but wonder if it’s ascent is possible. From my first day climbing in Canada, just on the other side of the valley, getting into that range was on my mind; I just had to find out how to go about it. My opportunity came a month later, on my second trip with the Varsity Outdoors Club at UBC in Vancouver, where I was starting a year of exchange. Someone had proposed a trip into the Tantalus, taking a boat to cross the river into the range and climbing up to a hut for the weekend.

I’d just met Alice, a vibrant quasi-Glaswegian who had just tumbled into Vancouver after a summer in Chamonix, the legendary home of fast and light alpinism, and we quickly decided we would take on Alpha via its East ridge. As it turned out, we were neither fast nor light, carrying a full trad rack and rope a vertical kilometre, then making a 2am start from our bivvy outside the

hut. While the rain did clear as we’d hoped, the water in the branches we crashed through for the next two hours soaked us to the skin, so when we hit the snow line we froze instantly. With glacier travel ahead of us and another couple of hours before sunrise, it was time to head down. Arriving back at the hut as others were rising, we settled back into our sleeping bags, rattled by mild hypothermia and all the bear droppings we’d spotted in the woods. Our first alpine attempt in Canada had resulted in a severe ass-kicking.

After that early season snow came two months of rain in Vancouver, so alpine season was over. Driving out along the Sea-to-Sky highway between Vancouver and Whistler every weekend put the Tantalus Range in full view, as we watched the conditions change over the season. The particularly deep snowpack that year meant that when it came time to leave Canada at the end of my year to head down to Perú for the Marañón trip, we still hadn’t had a chance to redeem ourselves on Alpha.

Two months later, due to a stuff-up negotiating with airlines, I’d ended up with a two and a half day stopover in Vancouver on my way home from Lima. By chance, Alice also had a similar window. “Mate, let’s climb Alpha”; we don’t know who said it first, but we both knew we had to try. In theory there was enough time, as long as everything went right. Land on Thursday afternoon and



By: Jack McCutchan

source our gear. Hitchhike up to Squamish on Friday morning, make the crossing into the Tantalus and climb up to camp by the hut. Make an early start to summit in the early morning on Saturday, descend the whole 2,300m down to Squamish. Maybe even time to climb a lap of our favourite rock route, then hitch back to Vancouver and fly out at 11.30am on Sunday morning. It would be possible, but tight.

Things got off to a good start, staying with our friend Tobias who lent us the bits and pieces of gear we still needed. We all set off on Friday morning, loading ourselves on the public bus laden with packs covered in ice axes, crampons and climbing gear, riding through downtown Vancouver to where we knew we could hitch. Our thumbs were out for about an hour before we managed to get hold of a ride to

Squamish. From the back road where we’d been dropped, it was a few kilometres walk down a logging road to the Squamish river, made slower by the need to eat all the wild thimbleberries in sight along the way. At the river, we were faced with our next obstacle, a pair of cables stretched 150m across to the other side.

Climbing over the barbed wire fence and up a steel tower, we found a locked cable car attached to the bottom cable, with four big air traffic cones hanging above. Crossing was best done one at a time, due to the big wobbles generated in the middle as we manoeuvred past the cones. We were clipped to the top wire and balancing on the bottom cable, with packs dragging along behind and a huge glacial river passing beneath us.

Once all three of us had



PHOTO BY: TOBIAS HUXOL
CROSSING THE SQUAMISH RIVER
CLIPPED TO THE TOP WIRE AND
BALANCING ON THE BOTTOM CABLE.

crossed over to the base of the Tantalus, we just had room to climb up to the hut at Lake Lovely Water. The climb was uneventful, but Alice and I both felt the fatigue of the past few days; it had been a mad rush from the simplicity of the Marañón River to catch an overnight bus to Lima and then a series of flights here. We arrived at camp after dark and had a quick dinner before stringing up our food where the bears couldn't reach and went to sleep for a few hours.

Rising at 2am, we made much better progress up the hill this time. Conditions were warm and dry, but a deep snowpack made progress slow as we approached the glacier, putting on crampons soon after the sun hit. A short climb on corn snow brought us up to where we thought the route might start properly. Descriptions about the route are left intentionally

vague, so when we looked at a short section of crack that looked possible, we decided this would do. It was the first time I'd climbed a rock route in mountaineering boots, so my first attempt up the crack ended in a surprisingly long fall, good gear and a soft catch stopping me just above a sharp ledge, but we were soon making steady progress up more moderate climbing sections. We transitioned smoothly between pitched sections, simul-climbing and unprotected scrambling as necessary, chewing through the elevation gain now that we were in our stride and enjoying the sunshine. A last down-climb and scramble up to the true summit gave us a panoramic view of the Tantalus Range, across the valley to the Mt Garibaldi park and down the Howe Sound all the way to UBC in Vancouver.

Thoughts quickly turned to the descent; we still had a long way to go to get me on the plane back home the next morning. The first couple of hundred metres were lost by a careful scramble, then a series of abseils took us down another couple of hundred. Glissading snowfields down to the tree line had us feeling confident with the progress we were making, until we looked at the steep drop in front of us. A maze of dense forest, waterfalls, cliffs, fallen wood and bog was between us and the lake we were aiming for. Some combination of climbing, abseiling, sliding, falling, swearing and tears continued for the next few hours, until we were back at camp, with another room of descent to go. The clock was ticking as we ran down the steep trail with heavy packs and with knees buckling, we made it back to the cables as darkness set in.

The crossing was an intimidating prospect even in the daytime, but in darkness it proved too much for Alice. Her screams echoed around the valley, as she swung violently above the river. Pitching a few metres forward, then a few metres backwards, looking down into the cold water below her, there was nothing Tobias and I could do but watch and call out to try and calm her down. She managed to get back to the Tantalus side eventually and was able to cool down, not helped by the strange noises in the forest below us that

we were sure were bears. By the time we'd rigged up a tyrolean traverse to reduce the wobbling and all made it back across to Squamish, it was 11pm. The back road that we were intending on hitching along was now empty, so we stumbled along in the dark. I felt myself falling asleep as I walked, sometimes stumbling off the road and into the ditch.

At 1.30am we sat on the curb outside McDonald's in Squamish, downing McDoubles in front of a curious policeman, along with the all the drunken folk who had made a similar pilgrimage to the golden arches. One of them took interest in us and offered a place to nap on her lawn in exchange for walking her home, so we did get a brief couple of hours rest before it was time to head back to the highway and stick the thumbs out again. As the sun rose, it became apparent that we'd need a miracle for me to make my flight on time. It kills me to say it, but we ended up paying someone a lot of money to drive us a couple of hours back to Vancouver. A quick shower and repack and I was out the door on the way to the airport, making it with just enough time to sneak through check-in with my overweight bags of gear, wearing my mountaineering boots and a lifejacket on the flight. We'd done it, pulled through the tight squeeze and summited a beautiful mountain in a perfect 2.5 day window, now it was time to sleep all the way back to Melbourne.

WINTER-CROSSING OF THE MAIN RANGE

By: Adele Westgård



Trip itinerary: Ski the Main Range from Kiandra to Dead Horse Gap in 6 (+2.5 days of driving) days in late September, crossing as many peaks above 2000 meters as possible on the way, including Mt. Kosciuszko and Mt. Townsend. Trip result: Ski the main range from Mungah power station to Dead Horse Gap, via the upper Snowy River, Charlottes Pass and not as many peaks as initially expected.

Planning:

Liv and I (Adele) were sitting in the clubrooms chatting casually when suddenly Liv says, “I want to ski the main range, let’s apply for the adventure grant and go” All said and done, we decided we wanted to cross the main range from Kiandra to Dead Horse Gap along The Alpine Walking Track, including as many summits along the way as possible. We found many blogs and articles on people

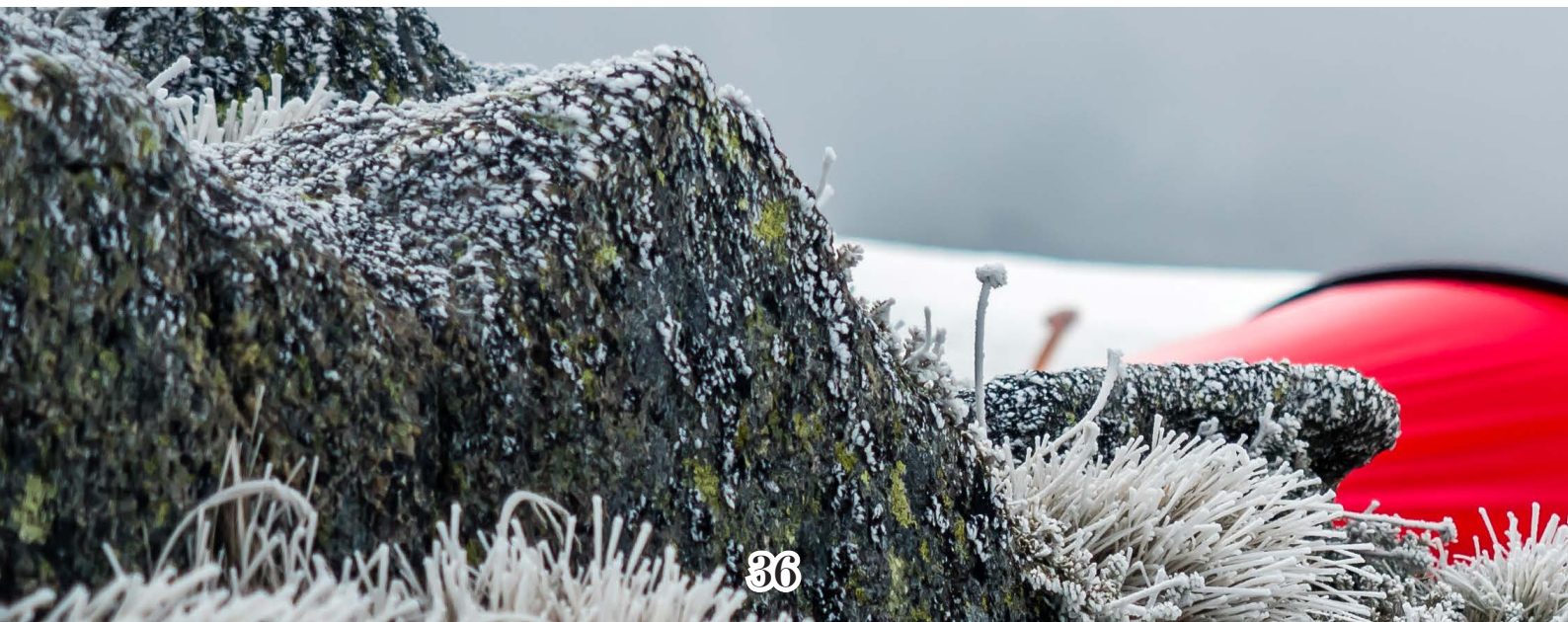
doing the trip by foot on bare ground during our research, few said they had done it in winter on skis, so we knew little about what we could expect, except for what the alpine walking track book could tell us, on summer conditions. First issue: where do we camp when a section of about 40 km has “no camping” zones in potential sheltered spots and “highly exposed, do not camp in poor weather” disclaimers on the rest of the path? We decide to hope for good weather and took note of our potential escape routes to safe routes.

Next issue, I had a busy semester in uni, Liv worked 16 hour shifts, how do we coordinate planning, and when can we both get time off work and uni? Solution: we go during the spring mid-semester break (late September) when Liv got 7 days off. We left at night after she finished work and came back late in the night of the day

before she had to be back at work. Planning time? An hour or two the week before we left...

Day 1: Melbourne – Wangaratta
I finished my chemistry lab at 5.30 pm, Liv got off her shift at 6 pm – time to pack and get on the road. Already tired after a long week, we decided to camp in the bush outside Wangaratta, about 1.5 hours out of Melbourne.

Day 2: Wangaratta – Mungah Power station
After a good sleep we got up early and packed up the tent and got back on the road. Breakfast in Albury/Wodonga on the way, Liv was driving, and I was trying to organise a car shuffle between Kiandra and Dead Horse Gap. We realised quickly that this car shuffle could become expensive. The first plan had been getting Liv’s sister who lives in Canberra to provide a second car, however



ADVENTURE GRANT



her car did not agree and decided to go on a strike, breaking down a few days before.

Second option: we knew that another group of OXO's were heading up the weekend after, maybe would get there in time to help us? Shout-out to Gina for trying, (thank you!), however, it turns out the day they arrived was the same day we needed to be on our way back to Melbourne.

Which lead us to a third option: Were there any companies that could help us? We got on the phone with Jindabyne wilderness sports shop and got on the phone with Bruce after several attempts where lack of phone reception broke the connection. Bruce got us in contact with a helpful lady who could do the car shuffle for us, but it would cost us more than we were willing to pay.

So, that lead us to our fourth and final option, play it by chance and hitchhike.

We arrived in Jindabyne around lunch time in lovely hot spring weather, this did not look promising for our snow. We were still set on leaving from Kiandra at this point, but realised after a chat with Bruce when we got to the wilderness shop, that Kiandra was a poor bet. He could tell us that all snow at Kiandra was melted, and if we started there, our first 1-2 days would be on foot (whoopsie!). The recommendation was to start from Mungah power station. He supplied us with maps and some last-minute emergency supplies, loading straps and spare pole baskets. We got the pulk-enclosed sled for ski gear- we had booked a plastic "boat" with two metal poles attached to a harness and a fabric cover to keep everything inside. Bruce told us that this pulk was

bought in the USA, transported to Australia and then brought to Greenland for a ski-kiting expedition by two local blokes (take note of this information people, we'll get back to the Greenland expedition and kiting later on). We went shopping for the groceries we needed to fill in what we didn't already have: Gatorade, chocolate, lollies, awesome Nutella and cheap bourbon in two small plastic bottles then headed for Mungah power station.

Day 3: Mungah Power station - Whites River hut

We woke up to lovely sunshine and had breakfast next to the river, we quickly realised it was going to be a hot day while packing up our stuff, so we put on sunscreen packed up. Our ski trip started with carrying the pulk on our side, skis on our backs, wearing t-shirts and rolled up pants with ski boots walking up a steep dirt-road by

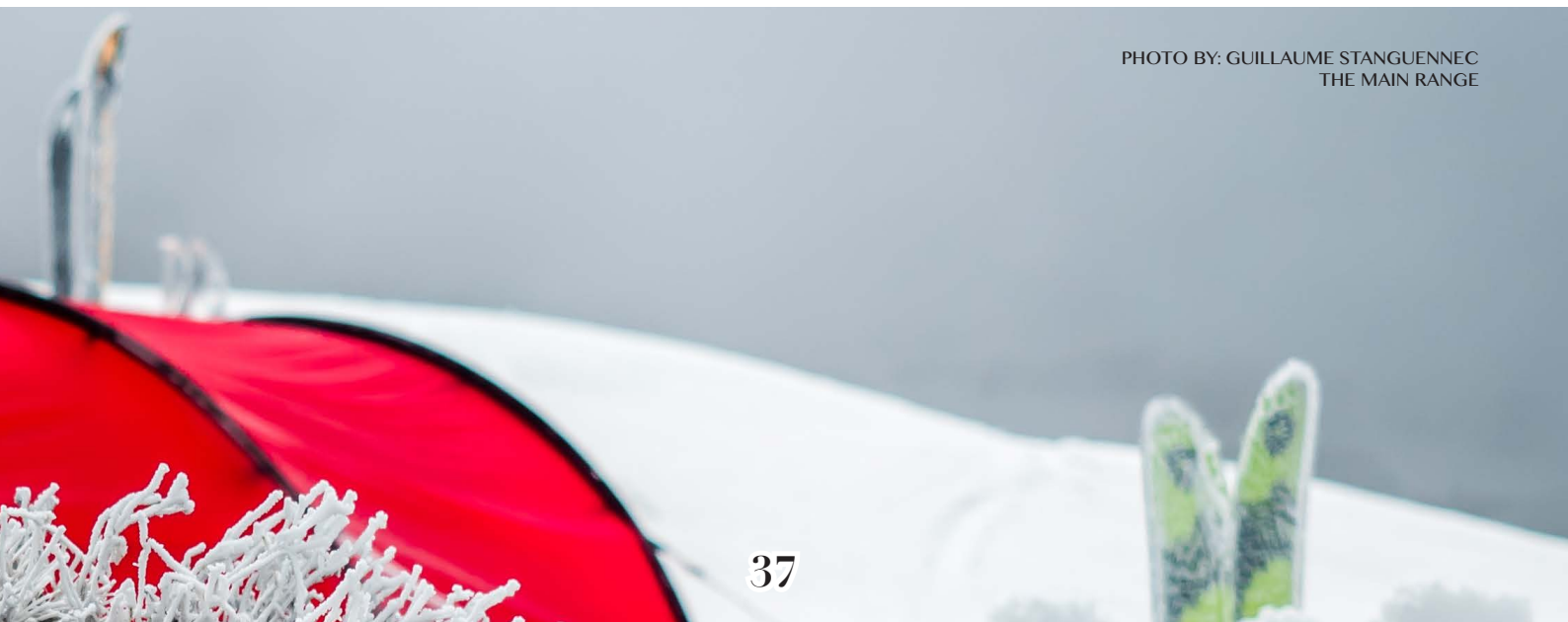




PHOTO BY: GUILLAUME STANGUENNEC
THE MAIN RANGE

foot. No snow to be seen the first 800 meters of uphill. We met a friendly fellow skier at the car-park, he was heading up for the weekend enjoying his day off from outdoor education by heading outdoors educating Liv and I on the local area.

Our worst enemy that day; the sun and heat. I got a lovely tan between my rolled up pants and ski boots, it's still there... Wet from sweat and exhausted by heat and getting used to pulling the pulk, we arrived at Whites river hut where we stayed the night, sitting out a short thunderstorm that passed over-night.

Day 4: Whites River hut somewhere in the vicinity of the Mt Tate/Mt Anderson saddle. We woke up to strong winds, unsure about how to proceed, we decided to head towards Mt. Tate, aiming for the Anton/Anderson saddle with the disclaimer in mind that the wind might chase us off the mountain and back to the hut. The morning was lovely, beautiful sunny weather and the wind was strong, but bearable. We crossed the rolling grounds, which we had worried about due to risk of low visibility, but that didn't arrive until later in the day. Approaching Mt. Tate, the winds gradually increased. We stopped for lunch, but there was nowhere to find shelter, so we kept going. Bracing against the wind as we walked, trying to find the best path

around the peak of Tate, we had to stop to keep balance with every gust of wind. The back of the peak was the best sheltered, but least recommended to walk. A steep traverse between massive boulders on patchy snow of parts slush, ice and no snow/puddles gave us the challenge of keeping the pulk upright and navigating it through already challenging terrain on skis. After finally passing the peak and getting into the saddle with limited visibility and estimated 80-90 km/h winds, we had to find somewhere to rest. It was already 2 pm, to get to our goal we had to pass Mt. Anderson – the peak is preceded by three steep gullies and knobs in all directions, an area requiring good navigation skills in good visibility – we couldn't even see the lower knobs through the clouds. Just past the saddle we had a steep traverse (measured to about 40 degrees) of the first knob to pass. Staying in the saddle was not an option as it was too exposed, we saw an opportunity for a possible sheltered campsite among some trees behind the next knob, so that became our new goal. The traverse required careful consideration of snow conditions for avalanche risk, calculated skiing across-which involved balancing the pulk to prevent it from tipping over and rolling down-traversing, making sure to keep a safe distance between Liv and I. Had the weather been better, it would've been the perfect play-slope, but setting up shelter was our main

interest at this point.

We found a semi sheltered spot behind a big wind load and started digging out a space for our tent and building a wall of snow to protect it. An activity that we got plenty of practice in over the next few days. Our visibility was now less than ideal, and the winds did not seem to slow down, time to get into the sleeping bags and tell stories to pass time.

Day 5: Day 4 camp – Seamans hut. We woke up to a white wall of cloud. Winds had slowed down, though it wasn't still. The night before we had tried to work out our exact location, however the low visibility gave us no better result than somewhere on a knob between Mt. Anderson and Mt. Tate. Our initial plan was to wait and hope for better visibility, then cross Mt Anderson and Mt Anton. The weather did not have the same plan, so we improvised and followed a creek down to the Snowy River, now we are pretty sure which knob we had camped on that night, compass direction of the creek gave us solid answers.

We ended up traversing steep slopes along the river. Some rather challenging terrain, no matter the mode of transportation made progress slow. One of us pulled the pulk, the other one was in charge of pushing from one side, helped

by pushing it uphill and made sure it didn't fall over. We quickly learnt that pulks have limitations: It doesn't like quick turns, so carving is a no-no.

Although it was steady when packed right, it will still tip over on sudden bumps or steep traverses. The limit of slope steepness? About 40-50 degrees. Nope, the pulk won't slide backwards and pull you with it on steep uphill, however, you get stuck and can't move either backwards or forwards without anyone helping you push or pull. So our recommendation, have a spare loading strap to attach the pulk to your friends backpack, it will make life easier.

We aimed for Charlottes pass, a ski-resort that cannot be accessed by car in winter, hoping for a hot chocolate when we got there. However, low visibility made navigation tricky again. We couldn't see any peaks or features except for the river on our left. Side creeks of the Snowy River were all covered in snow, so counting creeks was a challenge. "Creek or just a gully? Small or big creek? Could this one be the run-out from Club Lake, we're almost there, never mind it can't be, or?". Getting out on a big open plain then gave us something to

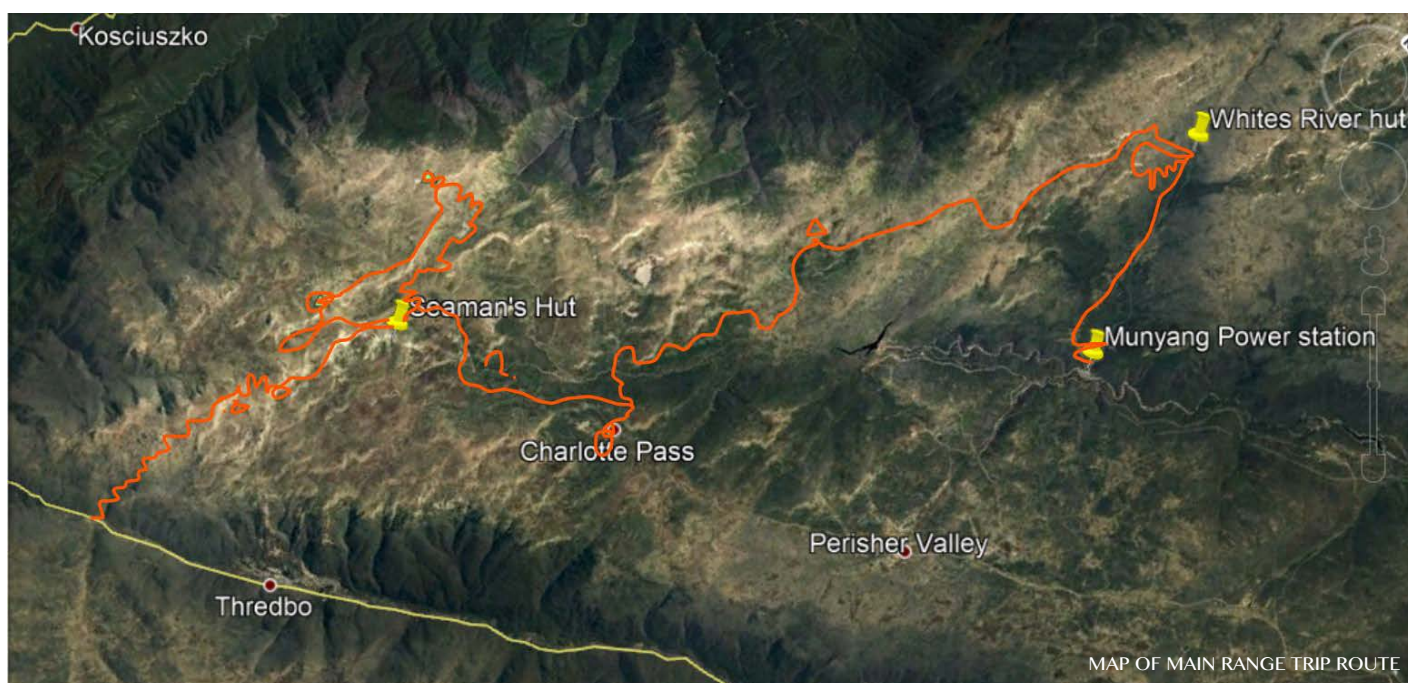
look for on the map, the snow bridge should be close. So what navigating features gave us the answer? A chimney... Liv: Adele, look! There's a chimney in the middle of this open space. She wasn't wrong and guess what, that chimney was marked on our map, a historical ruin.

Crossing there and climbing a steep hill while pulling the pulk together; 100 steps stop breathe. 50 steps stop breathe, repeat. 30 steps stop -breathe repeat many times. All the way to the top. Then a fun ski down the hills of the closed resort, into a dystopian empty Charlottes Pass village. Nothing open. No hot chocolate. The weather was far from optimal, windy, poor visibility, a bit of rain in the air.

A bit bummed, we found one open accommodation. One man working and two guests, a father and daughter from Queensland. Friendly and not so friendly faces, we got to dry off a bit of gear, warm up, have lunch and they even made us hot chocolate! A grumpy old man was walking around too, and we knew we weren't welcome for too long. So, we packed up and headed back out. The weather was worsening, and we knew it would get even worse. It was late afternoon, about 4.30 pm. So new plan. Camp within the resort (not

so popular maybe) or ski the 7 km to Seamans hut before dark at 6pm?

There were snow poles along the path, so we decided to smash it out. Now it should be mentioned that we were in the resort and had to walk up the where the lifts would normally run and our pulk wasn't that lightweight. I started pulling the pulk, stubborn to get to the hut in time I started with most of the weight alone, pushing quickly and steady up the resort hill. At the top, I was sweaty and my legs were complaining already, I hadn't considered the fact that we had another 6.5 km in bad weather over big windloads (felt like walking across 1.5 meter high frozen waves). I got tired quickly, but kept pushing through, walking to one pole, stop breathe, two poles, stop breathe, one pole more and stop breathe. We kept skiing like that for about an hour. Both of us tired and slightly concerned about the weather, but determined to reach the hut. My legs refused to keep going, so we swapped and Liv took the pulk and travelling became a bit faster and easier. We knew the dark was creeping in soon, the clock was ticking, and we had nothing to tell us how far along the path we were, just walking from pole to pole. At this point we started struggling to see the next pole. We knew we had





crossed two bridged as we got poles on both sides across them, we should be almost there.

We started on a steep hill, if we were correct, the hut should be on the top of this one, just one problem. We couldn't see the next snow pole anymore. We kept walking as far as we could without losing sight of the pole behind us. What do we do. Options are, wait and hope we can spot a feature that can help us, stop to set up camp and do our best with securing the tent hoping it can stand through the night at a very exposed location or walk further with the risk of getting lost

(bad choice kids). So we waited and tried to spread out to see more.

We could see a feature in front of us, it could be the hut we saw at this point. We made the decision to walk to it, if it wasn't the hut we would set up camp there and wait out the weather.

It was the hut. Few minutes after arriving and starting to prepare a fire, another group arrived in the dark. It wasn't their first time there, they had the hut coordinates saved on their GPS so their first comment was "You found it in this weather without a GPS?!".

As the conversation goes on that night in a warm hut with drying clothes on ropes all over the place and hot sangria in the mugs, it turns out these guys were kilters and were there to play in the winds. One of the guys, had been a part of a Greenland expeditions a few years earlier, they were kiting across the country. Before they went they had bought a pulk from the USA, but on their test run with it on the Main Range prior to their expedition the pulk crashed into a rock and got a whole in the bottom. The pulk didn't go to Greenland with them, but was

sent to Jindabyne wilderness shop for repairs. The pulk was forgotten about for a while, until one of the kilters had hired this pulk from the little shop in Jindabyne for a new Main Range trip and they realised it was the very same pulk. Today, these guys have bumped into people with the same pulk all over the Main Range, this list of people includes Liv and I, hiring a pulk from the USA that may or may not have been to Greenland, but has been kiting and skiing around Kosciuszko national park many times.

Day 6: Seaman's hut

This day we decided to have some fun. We wanted to tick off a few summits. So we skied Mt Kosciuszko, Mullers peak and Mt Townsend, then dropping down into Lake Albina and enjoyed a calm day of beautiful sunny weather. The day finished with watching a beautiful sunset while eating chocolate outside the hut.

Day 7: Seaman's hut - Dead horse gap - Melbourne

We packed up in the late morning and started our ski out towards Dead Horse Gap and had a fun ski through steep forested hills towards the car. Liv hitchhiked back to the car, I stayed back with our gear, explored the area and ate awesome Nutella from the jar while waiting outside in beautiful weather. We dropped the pulk and a bottle of cheap Bourbon, that had crossed the Main Range, off with Mitch who was the for the Snowy River extreme race. He took the pulk back to Jindy and we started the drive back to Melbourne.

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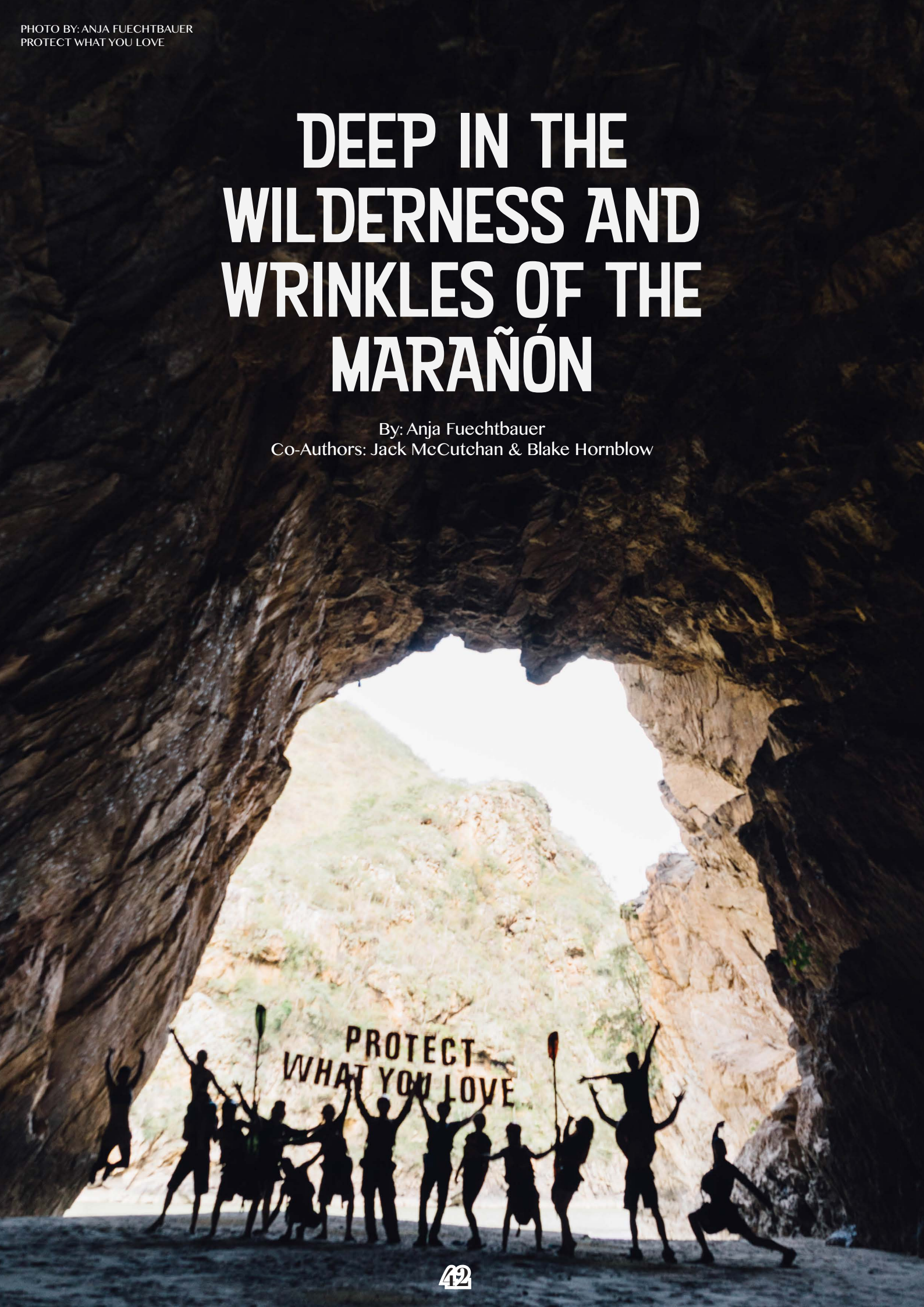
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DEEP IN THE WILDERNESS AND WRINKLES OF THE MARAÑÓN

By: Anja Fuechtbauer
Co-Authors: Jack McCutchan & Blake Hornblow



Mornings on the river usually started like this: First came the sandflies. Small ones like the ones in New Zealand - but smart and on venom steroids. They didn't let themselves be killed easily and their bites had us scratching for days, weeks even. Next came the sun, crawling over the ridgeline into the canyon and hitting our camp where most of us were still curled up in sleeping bags. Last came the dragonflies, our favourite morning sight, besides breakfast. A whole cluster would appear and, like a brilliant little squadron of fighter jets, they would race along the river bank and devour anything in their way. Sometimes there were hundreds of them. Chasing and eating the mosquitos that had come to eat us.

In this case "us" was a group of fifteen OXOs and friends of OXOs in their mid-twenties. We were a team of outdoor enthusiasts, whitewater paddlers, climbers, canyons, conservationists, explorers and dreamers. We finally came together mid-June in 2017 after months of document sharing, skype sessions, bottles of wine and a skill weekend at Mount Arapiles. If Ben Webb was any other than the worry-free self we all know, he would be a couple of grey hairs richer by now. We planned a 28-day expedition on the Rio Marañón in Perú:

kayaking and rafting downriver to explore canyons nobody has descended before. Ben had made good on his promise to get a trip off the ground and we were excited it was finally happening.

The Rio Marañón winds its way through the Peruvian Andes where it has created "The Grand Canyon of the Amazon". The Marañón joins with the Ucayali near Iquitos to become the Amazon River- the largest river in the world and the artery that supports the Amazonian rainforest. We started at Chagual and finished at Puerto Malleta. A section of the river dotted with grade II - IV rapids and a hell of a lot of flat water in-between. The river was a sediment rich, milk-coffee coloured giant flowing underneath high cliffs. Various species of the spiky cacti were present everywhere, some of which we would get to know a bit too well.

Organisation and logistics of the trip were a character building experience. We were based in Australia, New Zealand, South America, Canada, the US and Sweden whilst organising the trip... We had one gear raft, one passenger raft and six kayaks. We had one re-stock point halfway down the river near Celendín. We had to feed 15 people for 28 days at least three times a day, that's 1260 plates! Temperatures of 30

degrees Celsius during the day added to the nightmare of fresh food storage. Drinking and cooking water had to be collected, filtered and treated every day. The radios, satellite phone and the drill (to place bolts in canyons) had to be kept dry and charged throughout the journey.

To date it has been by far the longest and most remote trip I and many others from the group have ever done. The expedition only felt real once I wiped away the condensation on the bus window and pressed my nose against the cold and wet glass: finally the river. Growing bigger and bigger under a pale blue morning sky.

While organising the last bits and pieces next to the river we were eaten by sandflies head to toe. We hadn't quite grasped how badly it was going to itch and how often "stop scratching" would be said. At noon we were off! Nothing from the outside world would reach us for a month. The Marañón flowed along in a steady but swift current-mirroring how I felt about the trip as it unraveled. Days could feel very steady and slow, drifting and paddling down the river, hanging out at the beach campsites while others chose to explore a canyon or visit a village. Time seemed endless, yet the trip was over way too soon.

PHOTO BY: ANJA FUECHTBAUER
STARRY STARRY NIGHT

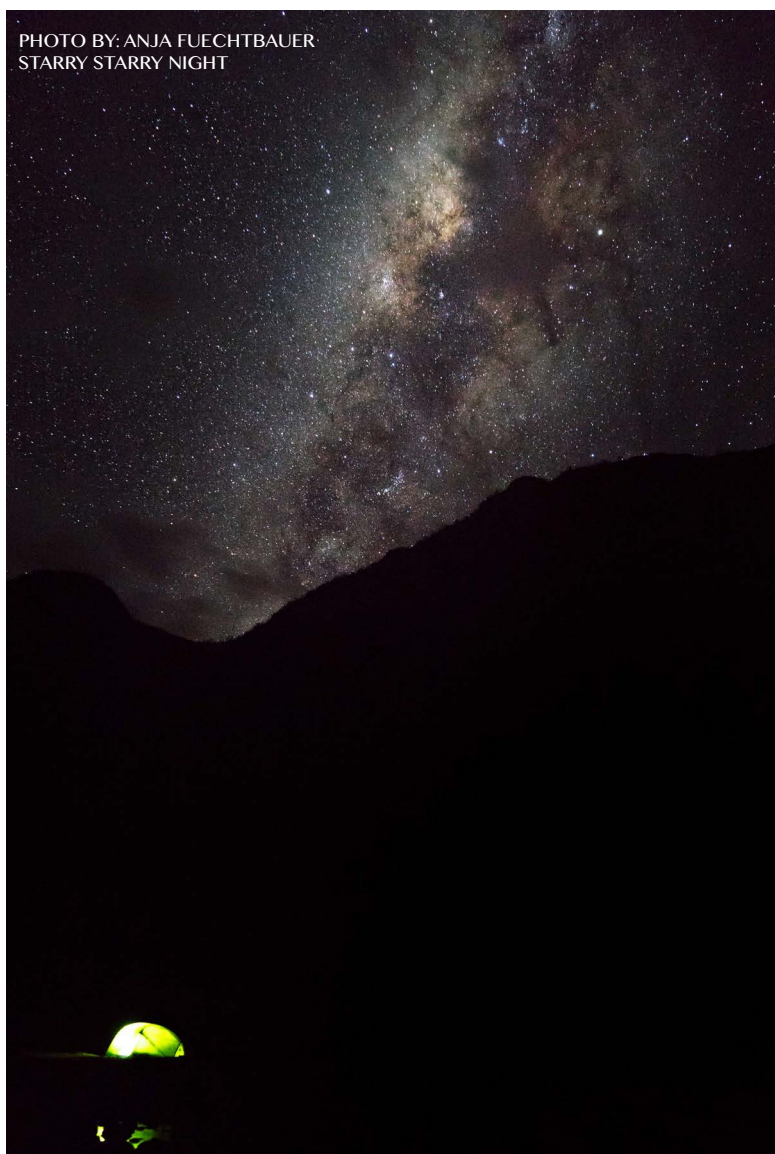




PHOTO BY: BLAKE HORNBLow
MORNINGS ON THE RIVER

But I am getting ahead of myself.

Muro Poso

Our first big goal of the trip was Muro Poso Canyon which means 'Hole-in-the-Wall canyon'. Our most promising but probably also our most challenging canyon descent. Towering above us, a 100 metre cliff, with colours alternating between sandstone orange and pine green. A waterfall appeared at the bottom of a vertical slot and ran from the top of the cliff to two thirds down the wall. The waterfall looked fantastic: white spray in front of a shimmering black background. It vanished behind a small ridgeline.

The pre-assessment of the canyon via Google earth lead to its exploration in two parts. Part one was the lower canyon which started where the top of the little ridge met the waterfall and finished at camp. Part two would see us moving downriver around

the next bend or two and then hike up the back of the mountain to establish a high camp. From there we hoped to find an entry into the canyon and also an exit point before the stream excited over the cliff.

We setup camp at the bottom of the canyon. At first we loved our camp - white soft sand and a shower waterfall nearby - but then the wind picked up and turned the beautiful white sand into a nightmare. It was everywhere. One night the wind didn't let off and I woke up absolutely caked in sand - inside my tent! We called this camp SAF - "Sandy as fuck" camp. Two months after the trip I am still finding sand in my gear.

To scout for an access point to the canyon, Evie and I were sitting on the beach facing the cliff, using the radio to navigate Matt, Jack and Richard through the maze of

rocks and cacti on the ridge. We had named the features before the scouting team took off in order to ease navigation. 'Baby bear', 'little echidna', 'the tooth' and 'castle' were only some of them. Eventually a way was found and hand-lines fixed. At night we prepared the ropes and hardware, went over the communication plan and determined a first descend team. In the end Nicole, Richard, Matt and Evie would go while other experienced canyoneers would be on stand-by outside the canyon in case of an emergency.

The team took off the next morning and came back cold and wet but with big smiles on their faces and the odd cactus spike in their hands. It had gone smoothly, the 'go' for us to send the rest of the group into the canyon was given. In the meantime - in preparation for the upper canyon - Ben and Taner took two packrafts



PHOTO BY: ANJA FUECHTBAUER
NIGHTS ON THE RIVER

to paddle ahead and gain permission to pass through a village on the way to the upper Muro Poso canyon. A fun watch as Taner managed to capsize at the first flurry of white-water in a stone's throw from camp... After their return we had one more very important task to ensure our river journey would go smoothly: we had to appeal to Pashmina, the mother of the earth of the indigenous people of the Andes. At night we stood at the edge of the river, lit a piece of sandalwood, chewed coca leaves, gave thanks and asked for a safe passage through her land. In the morning I teamed up with Nicole, Alice B and Isabel for an all-girls group. We started the hike up, got lost once or twice, left some blood on the cacti before we arrived at the hand-lines. First canyon ever here I come. The first drop was 60 metres. The waterfall we had seen from the beach plummeted down to our left and we abseiled

right into it. There was a total of six abseils in the canyon and easy rock scrambling in between. Nicole taught us canyoning skills as we went, so every person in the team could take turns going ahead to set the abseils. The teaching slowed us down and another group lead by Matt caught up to us. The very last abseil to camp had a tricky start over a lip in the water and was mastered by everyone (more or less) elegantly. We finished the day off by dancing underneath a waterfall.

By the time we got back to camp half the team had already gone to scout the upper canyon. The short paddle down the river was a horrendous fight against the afternoon wind. For most of it I kept my eyes closed to avoid getting my eyeballs sandpapered. Matt, Isabel, Alice B and I were the last group to start the walk up to high camp the next day. We left late afternoon to avoid

the heat of the day. Between the four of us we had two stubbed and one likely broken toe and two dodgy knees. Go us. It was a good walking path and progress was, despite our injuries, not too bad. The sunset views over the river valley were stunning, the mood was good and the temperature pleasant. After three hours we found everyone sitting around the fire. When I laid out my sleeping gear I noticed little lights blinking in regular intervals around me fireflies! I'd never seen them before and they got me incredibly excited! Night-time on the Marañón was special. In this remote area of our planet, there was no light pollution which meant the sky was peppered with stars! We counted at least five or more shooting stars every night and the Milky Way was superb.

Over dinner the scouting team shared their findings of the day with us. Entry and exit points

had been located, a first descent team would try their luck the next day. While they explored, Alice B and Taner decided to walk to El Poso a nearby village to get more food. We left around 9AM. The walk was supposed to be 'only around 45 minutes' as per Ben's local info. The path wound uphill, zig-zagging back and forth. It was getting hot and we had barely any shade. Locals came past and mumbled a shy 'buenas'. After three hours of climbing and just when I let out an "if we don't arrive within the next 15 minutes, I'll go back", the gate to the village appeared.

We squeezed past a tarantula sized spider on the gate and entered the town, where we were greeted by an elderly woman. I was surprised to see how short she was. I am 5'4" tall and she was at least one head shorter than me. She had her long silver hair braided in the local fashion under her hat. She was the owner of the local shop and sold us pasta, juice and lollies. Not quite a feast for dinner, but better than sending people back to the river to bring more supplies up to High Camp. She gave us some of the white drink she had in a jug. It was a warm milk-oat drink. For us exhausted walkers it hit just the right spot. It was delicious!

This village was a solid couple of hours away from the water, perched on the mountainside and didn't seem to get any gringo visitors at all. We visited the school across the road. The kids were friendly and curious but very shy. We talked to the teacher and took a photo together. We would have loved to spend more time with them but we had to head back. Later that day we greeted the successful first descent team of the Upper Muro Poso.

The next day I got to go. Two groups left an hour apart from each other. Upper Muro Poso canyon was 'butterfly canyon'. We followed the stream amongst trees and plants and entered the canyon with a series of scrambles. If the stream was flowing roughly a metre wide, you'd be in it up to your shins. As we ventured deeper into the canyon, the walls beside us grew taller. There was no escape. The abseils were longer than in the lower section and good fun. At lunch a butterfly landed on Isabel. Grey and red on the outside of its wings, the inside black and fluorescent blue. As it flew off it turned into a pulsating beacon of light, the sunshine reflecting off its wings. We walked underneath house-sized boulders, through a jungle of reed, to a short abseil in which I desperately tried to stay out of the water. Instead I got showered in dirt and had to voluntarily stand underneath the cold waterfall to clean myself off. Richard couldn't stop laughing while I frowned at him. This concludes the Muro Poso canyon. Well, there are two parts to it. The sheer cliff section didn't fit in our time plan but maybe someone else will come back to claim a top to bottom descent?

We returned to pack up and under a bright pink sunset, set off to return to the river. Evie was sick. She had returned from the canyon and collapsed in the shade. We thought a combination of exhaustion, heat and maybe dehydration was the cause. Ben and Jack basically carried her down. She was chirpy and chatty and the only sign she was unwell were her legs just giving in underneath her every couple of steps. When we got into camp after a six hour walk, the self-saucing chocolate pudding that awaited us was the most delicious food I had ever had. And luckily Evie was better the next day.



PHOTO BY: MATT DUNWOODIE
ANJA ABSEILING ONE OF THE MANY WATERFALLS IN THE LOWER MURO POSO CANYON WHILE ISABEL GIVES HER A FIREMAN'S BELAY.

Raft Stories

One of the days started off with an unplanned raft flip which crushed the confidence of the passenger raft and when we approached the crux rapid of the whole trip shortly after a big and long grade IV rapid some people chose to walk it. I was nervous! The recent swim hadn't really been fun at all and if we were to flip in this rapid we were in for a particularly long and nasty one. We spent an hour scouting and making plans: Which lines to take in order to avoid two holes river right and centre and what to do if we missed our line? Ok. Plan A, B and C were in place. Ready?! No, not really but we went anyway. My heart was racing, my were palms sweaty and the recent swim was on replay. I didn't want to swim again. Well, to avoid that the solution was to paddle extra hard. As opposed to flat water sections, our raft team pulled it together in the white-water.



Our strokes were powerful and synchronised, our voices loud. Water splashed all around us and a high side or two were needed to avoid a flip. But we pulled through. We were overjoyed and confidence in our raft leader was re-established. Celebration time: we picked our first 'wild' coconuts along the river and cracked open the beers.

I was up early the next morning and looked around camp. I scanned the beach: faces poking out of sleeping bags, the kitchen, a raft - wait, a raft? Only one? Indeed, instead of one yellow and one red big rubber tub, there was only a red one. "Hey guys, where is the yellow raft?" I yelled. Like alarmed meerkats, people's heads shot up. It wasn't there. Had it floated off? Had we not tied it on properly? Half the groups life vests and helmets had been in the raft. The rope had been cut. Theft! And not just that but Manu's kayak and

gear were gone too. We were in trouble: we were still a day away from our halfway point. Evie had to leave today so she could catch her plane home and Tomi had to pick Marcus up and do the food shop in town for the second part of the trip. Bugger! Could we possibly all pile onto our gear raft and float downriver? There were several grade III rapids between us and town and now we didn't have PFDs or helmets for the majority of us. That would be sketchy!

The team jumped into action. Ben and Tomi walked to the village to investigate, Blake and Manu kayaked off downriver. Shortly after they had left we heard the noise of an engine. A long, yellow and blue striped boat came upstream. A family including a parrot in a cage, two dogs and several chooks on board. We signaled and yelled at them to stop. Mine and Taner's basic Spanish skills were sufficient enough to

communicate our dilemma. And to our surprise the man said that he knew who the thief was! Wait, what now? And on top of that he said he had the phone number of the father of the young men he suspected! Not that there was any phone reception at our beach... We negotiated with him to drop off his family and to return to help us. It was decided that Evie would leave with Tomi on the boat to town. Ben and Gabe would join them and try to recover the raft. All that the rest of us could do was to wait.

Late in the afternoon Ben and Gabe returned with a police officer! The story they had to tell was too good to be true: On their way downriver they had randomly pulled over at a house to ask for help. The owner of the house told them about two young guys who were sleeping off their alcohol fuelled night adventure in a backroom. While Ben and Gabe uneasily guarded the room, Tomi went to town with Evie to get the police. After ten minutes of questioning the two guys they admitted to the theft and showed the police where they had hidden their bounty. Our raft had already been half deflated. Ben's pelican case (with his camera inside) was still unopened and attached to the raft, as was Oscar the meerkat. Manu's kayak turned up about 500 metres uphill from our camp. Our life vests to be retrieved the next day at a random point along the river behind some bushes. The boys were handcuffed and brought to town and our gear returned to us.

Next up was Balsas, a semi modern town (it had electricity) and our halfway point. Ice creams and lunch while we waited for Tomi to return from Celendin with the shopping and Marcus who swapped places with Evie. We welcomed him on our raft with a wave train rapid immediately after leaving town. The first thing he yelled while we were in the midst of it, was 'this is way better than Macchu Picchu'. We bloody hoped so!



PHOTO BY: ISABEL CORNES
SAND IN YOUR EYEBALLS
WINNER OF 2017 PIE & SLIDE: CLUB PERSONALITY

Unfortunately, the next part of the trip was less pleasant. Isabel got sick, followed by myself, Alice B and Nicole. It was to be the worst of all the illness we experienced during the trip. We were vomiting and bathroom bound till late at night. Keeping hydrated was difficult enough, let alone trying to do so with chlorinated water. Soon I was dreaming of cracking open the beers which sat chilling in the river. Surely beer wasn't worse than vomiting chlorinated water? Chirpiness vanished after the fifth time I had thrown up and when the clouds took my stars away. I'd had enough. Eventually I cried myself to sleep. I heard Isabel and Alice still suffering in the distance till in the wee morning hours. I had been bad but they were even worse. The next day we slowly recovered thanks to a tea of coca leaves, limes and brown sugar. The only highlight of the day was the successful first descend of

Playa Cura canyon that had been underway whilst we succumbed to resting.

Jack shares his story of the Playa Cura Canyon:

>> We'd already discovered in previous canyons the true size of the mountains here – hard to comprehend through a computer screen – so we knew that those little black lines on the image had the potential to be much bigger and deeper slot canyons than we anticipated.

The Playa Cura canyon splits off into a web of tributaries, some looking more promising than others. Preparing for anything and being self-reliant in this remote environment means packing up a lot of gear, so after the heat of the day passed, Richard, Taner, Nicole and I packed our bags full. Keen to leave the growing pestilence of camp, we prepared for a few hours hike up the ridge in the

dark to sleep half way to the canyon entrance. Just as we were about to leave, Nicole's face dropped. "I think I feel it, I know what Anja was talking about now." Minutes later, she was added to the list of casualties. It was time to get out of here!

Gear was redistributed and the remaining three of us set off, wondering who would be the next to drop, since Nicole had been cooking dinner for everyone earlier. Our bivy spot on the ridgeline that night was the first flat spot we could find, just wide enough for three of us to squeeze under a single sleeping bag, with ropes for mattresses. In the morning our delight at the view below us was probably outdone by finding a tree that grew perfectly shaped spoons for porridge. Another hot few hours brought us to a small farm in the hills, where a man was growing bowls in a field. He grew a type of round melon that

he would hollow out and dry, then sell as beautiful bowls. As he saw us walking down the path, he had already started cooking yams for us. This was typical of the locals we met out in the hills, our communication skills were terrible but people were so welcoming and interested in what we were doing.

Finally reaching the canyon in the heat of the day, after a quick nap in the shade we started down a rocky creek bed that soon descended between steep walls. In comparison to the other canyons we'd explored so far, this branch of Playa Cura had a very mellow gradient and covered a longer distance. Simple scrambling was usually all that was required, passing through many slot sections before the canyon walls would briefly open up again, sometimes enough for cattle to walk all the way down into it. These cows turned out to be quite curious and had adventurous tastes the next day, sampling a range of Ben's gear, which he did not manage to recover from inside one cow's mouth. Narrow sections were carved through hard shale rock forming tight chutes, then opening out into sandy beaches inside the canyon that we wished we had the time to camp on.

The last few kilometres contained a number of larger waterfalls to descend, setting up the last of the abseils as the dark set in. After passing through so many slots, we'd lost track of how far we were along our map, so it was a relief to spot a tall cairn at the bottom of a large waterfall, indicating that this was the highest point reached by the party scouting the canyon from the bottom that day. We radioed back to camp as the walls receded around us, letting the planned search party know that they didn't have to make the hike in to try to make contact

with us. Unfortunately they had already hiked up from camp to check on us, so we all headed home together. Thankfully in our absence the health of the camp had improved a lot and we only had to hear stories of the horrors endured by Matt and Tomi while looking after the patients. A second descent party headed out early the next morning, making it out and back for dinner in a single push. <<

Life on the Marañón

After lots of canyons and time floating through magnificent landscapes we visited two bigger towns - Menden and Tupén Grande. We walked up a hill, across a bridge made out of three big bamboo tree trunks. The bridge looked as if it could only take one person at a time without falling apart. We followed a path through blooming coca fields. Open irrigation trenches rushed past us watering mango trees which were heavy with fruit. We walked past houses with turkeys bickering around them before entering the main village.

A huge, tall mango tree stood in the centre of the town. An elderly lady told us it was already this tall when she was a little girl. The town square was covered in bricks drying in the sun. The locals intended to rebuild and extend the community centre, which will also accommodate travellers. Being invited into different houses I noticed what I had imagined the remote Peruvian life would entail: guinea pigs. Adjacent to the shop was a dimly lit room. Sunlight only came in from one window above the stove on which a pot was boiling on a fire. Underneath, on the ground, a handful of white and brown guinea pigs. Eating the kitchen scraps unsuspecting of their eventual cookpot fate.

We were invited to join for a party that night. So instead of rafting, we spent the afternoon in the village helping to make bricks. We were told that families take turns to spend a day making bricks and carrying the 20kg finished ones to where they were needed.

Walking through town the opposition of the villagers to the proposed dams on the Marañón was clearly visible. "No a Chadin II" and "Río Vivo Marañón Sin Represas" were only two of several messages written on the walls of houses in bold red letters. Over twenty (20) mega dams are planned on the Marañón. The cumulative effects of those beyond measure. With a length of 1,737kms (excluding the Amazon River), tens or even hundreds of thousands of people will be adversely affected. Either their villages will be flooded or the local microclimate would change so much their crops for food and trade will not grow anymore. This will endanger, or maybe even eradicate endemic animal and plant species. Further downstream, towards the Amazon River, the tribes living along the river rely on the seasonal changes in water level to flood their plains to stay fertile. The sediment and nutrients which are currently travelling all the way to the rainforest will be trapped behind concrete. The river will turn into a series of still basins and choke to death. The locals are opposing the dam but their voices are as distant as their addresses. Their concerns trumped by marketing campaigns of developers and the government.

Due to the efforts of worried Peruvians, the locals and Ben, the Marañón Waterkeeper has been established. With the achievement of a postponement of some of the dams by five years they had a small victory but the likelihood of this river to vanish

is very high. The journey we did will probably not be possible in ten years' time.

Nevertheless, the evening celebrations were fun. Mountain trout was fried and rice boiled for us. We played volleyball with the kids, painted watercolours and danced. Jack's 'Knees to Elbow' dance is something that can't be described and shall probably go down in the local history books as an extraordinary gringo dance. We set off fireworks as a 'thank you' for their hospitality.

The next day we floated on to Tupén Grande. At the beach we bumped into two other groups. One was a bunch of rafters who had been on the river for a couple of weeks and camped at the beach. The other a woman named Emma Keltly who was on a mission to paddle the Río Marañón from source to sea. She was about to jump into her kayak to continue her journey and we didn't get to talk to her. Unfortunately, we found out months later that she had been robbed and killed on a section of the Amazon River by two young guys.

Tupén Grande was a 20 minute walk from camp. We lost a heated soccer match against the local kids (Blake blames "clumsy weak kayaking legs couldn't keep up with the quick play" and that our goal was "slightly uphill"), chatted with their parents and had a tasty candle lit dinner outside someone's house. Tupén Grande canyon was supposed to be explored around town. However, the villagers mentioned that a family in the hills might not be friendly to a group of gringos passing their land. Hours of talks and convincing later, the exploration team set off at 11pm at night. We don't think that

there ever was a real problem but rather surrendered to being 'peru'd'.

Blake remembers the Tupén Grande canyon descent like this:

>> After slogging up the ridge following a donkey trail for 3 hours we finally found a piece of flat ground to roll out sleeping bags, hoping we weren't on top of an ant colony, though I think everyone fell asleep too quick to find out. An early start had us cooking the classic oats, quinoa, chia mix to give us the energy to bush bash down through thick jungly terrain before we entered Tupén Canyon itself.

We began pushing slowly through our first real taste of Peruvian jungle. It was slow going. Taner even got a nip from one of the giant ants, and had gone bright red and his face was double its usual size before he asked, "Do you think I'm having an allergic reaction?" "Yes, Taner, I think you are..." We sat and gave him some drugs and he was fine in a few minutes but it gave us a chance to look closely and see a little of what the jungle looks like here - so many beautiful butterflies and beetles and an incredible diversity of flora.

After lunch the gradient really picked up and the abseils got larger and larger; these were the biggest drops the group had descended, the biggest estimated to be 70m. The crew was made up of Alice, Gabe, Manu, Matt, Taner, Nicole & myself and this was no longer our first canyon. We moved quickly, a few of us ahead setting up the next anchor while the rest of the group descended the previous drop. We kept thinking we must be close to the final abseil but the sun made it over the horizon



before we made it out of the canyon. We set up the sleeping bags for the night in the Canyon. It was incredible dropping through Tupén knowing we were the first to ever be in many of these places and it gave us all a strong desire to protect this village from the floods that would come with damming the Marañón.

One serving of porridge split between 7 set us into high spirits as we rappelled down the final few drops. We walked out through papaya, coconut and mango orchards and the generous farmers gave us delicious samples. Papaya had never tasted so good! This canyon was the highlight of the trip for many of us. Multiple big drops and the added adventure of an unexpected night out made it one to remember. <<



Las Cascadas

Back on the river we paddled the whole day, saw grass for the first time in weeks (and went a bit loopy over it) as we pulled up at the beach at Las Cascadas. Gabe paddled up to me and threw a handful of mud in my face. Oh it was on! What followed was the best mud fight I ever had! When the other kayakers arrived and we were showered in mud they were a tad stunned. But not for long, soon everyone was running around laughing, ducking away from flying mud or trying to wash themselves in the river. It was one of the funniest moments on the trip.

We camped at a beautiful beach backed by a subtropical forest. We could choose from four different canyons to explore. The raft group from Tupen was also

camped at the beach and they were kind enough to share some ice cold beers with us. Yes, if you have several rafts you can live in luxury. We organised a hitchhike downriver with them for the following morning. All things set we cracked open the Pisco, munched on the brownies we got from the other group, and had a (more or less) memorable night at the beach.

The next morning the rafters took us to the cable car. Luck was with us, a pick-up truck was present. We piled into the tray and instead of slogging uphill for hours, we raced around corners ducking underneath branches, enjoying the view. As we gained height we could see the river below us and the green hills above. The metal roofs of a small town in the distance. We

headed to Lonya Grande for a brief lunch and re-stock, then hired four tuk tuks to take us to the canyon. Another thrilling ride. Our tuk tuk set off in fourth place but under lots of cheering we arrived in first. Matt and Blake swapped with the drivers for a bit which was probably the scariest part of the whole trip!

Las Cascadas canyon was very different to all the others we'd seen so far. It was wide open, with many dry slopes and wet slides. We walked or scrambled a lot of it with only the occasional abseil. Pools of water often had to be crossed by swimming – a treat in the heat of the day. We even spotted pineapples growing in the canyon. A little bit green still but delicious! A highlight of the day was a five metre jump. I remember looking down into



the black pool beneath me. It had been ages since I jumped from such a height. When I finally mustered up my courage, I was thrilled! I plunged deep into the cool water and when I surfaced I couldn't stop laughing hysterically. Party canyon indeed!

We stopped for a very late second lunch and took off our shoes to dry out our wrinkly skin. We soaked up the afternoon sun, all too aware that it was one of the last days on the river. The end too near. As we walked down the last rock slide, the sun was slowly vanishing behind the ridge.

Isabel and I headed to a different waterfall the next day – Cascadas Libres. A waterfall which fell down an orange cliff shaped like an amphitheatre and which created a pool big enough to swim in it at its base. We saw hand-sized fluorescent blue butterflies, snakes and lizards. The place was out of this world. We felt strengthened in our plan to protect this area of

land. Before the trip, our crew had fundraised thousands of dollars to start establishing a conservation area at Las Cascadas. An area that will be flooded and gone forever if nobody tries to save it...

As well as making a huge sign to be hung across the river in our conservation efforts, we finally surfed the raft in a hole (after many failed attempts). It was a setup by Ben. He had manoeuvred his unsuspecting crew right into the hole. In no time, half the crew, including himself, were out of the raft while the rest of us were left spinning around in circles for ages. High siding as much as possible. When I tried to get us out of the hole with the paddle, it spun around and sent me swimming. It felt like the last big hooray of the river before it flattened out and the first signs of civilisation appeared.

Looking back at the journey now, and at the stories told,

they are only a fraction of our experiences. We lost our raft guide several times in different rapids, had hummingbirds come to visit camp, dinner failures and successes, exploding sunscreen bottles and murder games. We've seen places that nobody has ever seen before and experienced true and untouched natural beauty. For 28 days we had an experience that songs always talk about. For 28 days 'we were young, wild and free'. And we will be forever grateful for the opportunity to experience such unique places and people.

We want to help protect the Marañón and if you want more information please have a look www.avocadocollective.maranonwaterkeeper.org or find the Marañón Waterkeeper on Facebook - where a video from the trip has also been published.

Cheers to Ben and to the Avocado Collective for the trip of a lifetime!

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THAR SHE BLOWS

By: Anthony Cuskelly



PHOTO BY: VALERY OAK // BLACK CANVAS PHOTOGRAPHERS
THE RARE ORANGE COLOUR MORPH OF THE MOUNTAIN GOAD

Location: The Totem Pole, Tasman Peninsula, Tasmania

Weather forecast: 19°C, moderate winds, 2-4m swell.

Route of Choice: Deep Play / Free Route (65m 25)

Approach: 1.5-hour walk plus shenanigans.

Personnel: Julian Goad, Anthony Cuskelly, Lee from Adelaide.

Looking at the weather forecast, it's Friday or never, so Friday it is. The group in front of us have a split decision, so Lee (who we've never met before) joins Jules & I to climb as a three.

I head into the void first, abseiling 60m to a small ledge just above the sea. From there, it's a three-meter pendulum over the waves to try and latch the anchor on the

base of the pole. It takes me four shots, each one leaving the others wondering if maybe it's a never. Jules joins me, passes me the lead ropes, and immediately sets off again; the wind is whipping up a bit of spray and the less time spent down here the better...

Pitch one is "Deep Play": 20m grade 24 up a water-washed rock, mostly on bolts. Jules is about seven meters up when I see movement out of the corner of my eye, just in time to watch a wave come crashing down over my head.

"HOLY MOTHERF*****G F**K THAT'S F*****G COLD" echoes up to the tourist lookout as Jules watches his belayer emerge like

the eponymous Moby Dick from his bedtime reading.

I hang from the belay, dripping seawater and freezing, in a howling gale at the bottom of a 65m sea stack. What fun.

Jules takes note of his mildly hypothermic belayer and pulls on a bolt to get through the crux; another wave hits me before he manages to get to the belay. I briefly stop shivering but decide it's okay because I still feel cold. Tying in is a struggle and I can barely put my shoes on. The other lead rope and the abseil rope are left tied to the anchor for Lee.

Everything is wet. I pull on bolts, gear, and rope; I attach my microtraxion to the

rope when my hands don't work well enough; this is no longer about me climbing but about not having an epic. Jules shouts "thar she blows" from his lookout perch while Lee feels raindrops from a cloudless sky. My soaked gear continues to drip down on Lee and I manage to creep towards the belay ledge, which coincided with a small patch of sunshine.

Pitch 2 is the money pitch ("Free Route" pitch 2), 40m grade 25, again mostly on bolts. The ropes are dragged sideways by the wind and I have no idea how much slack is out. I can't hear Jules or even tell how worried he is because he has to fight the wind. It's a beautiful mixture of positive crimps, arête climbing



PHOTO BY: VALERY OAK // BLACK CANVAS PHOTOGRAPHERS
DEEP PLAY- CAN SEE THE WATER MARK HIGH OVER ANTHONY'S HEAD, BUT HE NEVER LET GO OF THE BRAKE

and sneaky moves; to on sight it in those conditions is bloody impressive.

My clothes have dried, leaving salt marks as evidence, but I'm still freezing. I do most of the moves but had burnt so much energy trying to stay warm that I can't do more than two in a row. Thankfully Lee is dragging the abseil rope, so that's one less thing to worry about.

Pitch 3 is the forgotten pitch; a 5m grade 17 crack to the very top. Of course we do it, and the tourists at the lookout wave as we perch like seagulls on our ridiculous pinnacle. There's no anchor, so it's a careful downclimb back to the ledge.

The final, most ridiculous part of the totem pole

is getting back off it... which is why Lee was dragging the abseil rope. We thread the bolts and fix the line back to land, and I slide across the Tyrolean traverse first. Jules and Lee release the tension and I fix it on the land side so they can join me.

We retrieve the traverse line and head back up to the lookout to sort gear and have lunch. I lie in the sun giggling for a while, thinking I'd love to go back in better conditions but I bet the story wouldn't be as interesting...



PHOTO BY: VALERY OAK // BLACK CANVAS PHOTOGRAPHERS
ANTHONY, LEE & JULIAN

A Tramp to Ivory Lake

By: Richard Bassett-Smith

PRELUDE

Ivory Lake is one of these names which has been floating around. I hadn't heard of it till I arrived at Polytech this year. It had only been mentioned a few times but when it had it aired an awe of..... mystery, challenge, something hard, rare, a reputation. I don't know the words but it didn't take long for me to add this place I knew nothing about to my list of adventures to be. I would complete this journey solo over five days, travelling through some incredible terrain.

OVERVIEW

A tramp heading into the hills behind Ross completing a circuit of the Waitaha and Tuke Rivers via Ivory Lake Hut. It was a private outing, not associated with Polytech although it was in part, to make up for Uber Tramp of which I would miss later in the year. I walked up through the Waitaha valley along tracks of various states, scrambled over river boulders and walked through tussock grasses. Taking advantage of the huts I spent the nights sheltered within before continuing once more. Reaching Ivory Lake on the third day to then pass up and over the peaks behind and enter the Tuke River Valley on day four. On the last day, I climbed up and out of the Tuke Valley and dropped into the Mikonui to reach the Totara Road end.

THE STORY

Ten days before Ivory Lake, when I made a quick dash to Melbourne for my friend's wedding, I picked up a pair of new hiking boots and was given a pack by a friend. Watching the weather, a window was opening. The question was, who would join me on this adventure to a place people would envy to have gone to? The previous day, I had managed to source a PLB. I'm glad the 'I Site' was open on Easter Sunday because the supermarkets weren't. Arranging a pick up for the end of the week only came together that evening and... did I mention I pulled the fruit cake out of oven at 11.30 pm that night?

I took the opportunity...

It's Happening... It's a long first day, arriving at Moonbeam Hut with less than an hour before dark. The terrain is moderate



PHOTO BY: RICHARD BASSETT-SMITH

An adventure of epic proportions, this is my path. It would be another five and a half hours to reach the Top Waitaha Hut, no more than three kilometers away. As the day wears on it begins to become a mental game. Occasionally the boulders force you to head into the bush, your mind would rather you stay amongst the river.



PHOTO BY: RICHARD BASSETT-SMITH

The Waitaha River on the second day. I busted my camera on day one, so I'm relying on the cheap camera from my phone now.

making for easy travel. The river boulders make a good scramble and the bush is well tracked but a little boggy at times. I'm making good time, with many short breaks including an hour-long feet-in-the-sun lunch break along the way to enjoy my surroundings. I say 'easy' but it's still a hard day and I feel pretty knackered. The possibility that I may have to return this way plays on my mind.

I managed to bust my SLR camera on the first day and I am now relying on the cheap phone camera. The photos offer their own kind of unique quality, out of focus at times, unable to capture what I wanted exactly but I kind of like the style and simplicity. We have been losing this simplicity as everything becomes newer and better than the last. What you see is how the photos turned out in their raw state with no editing.

The next morning, I awake knowing this day would be the test piece, if I can pull off today then, Ivory Lake would be there. I'm making good time, cross the wire bridge, pausing to admire in wonder at the river below. Further ahead the track passes a couple creeks and then it really starts to climb. On the map it shows it heading all the way up to 900 meters of elevation only to fall back down again to meet the river once more. If the track up was steep, the one down plummets.

The Upper Waitaha... There are moments when I am bewildered to be amongst this landscape. I'm in a section of the river where it rises some three hundred meters up, its torrents flowing amongst... I'm kind of lost for words and laugh aloud in the moment. How do you describe a boulder which is bigger than a house? I would pass several of this size over the next coming hours.

The walking poles are not so great for scrambling up, over, or around these boulders and have them strapped to my pack. No problems until I am forced off the river, to fight the scrub once and attempt to move around an otherwise impassable house-sized boulder. The poles then snag on every limb of scrub. I look for ways to stick to the river but miss any chance of catching a pre-trodden track and find my pack snagged once more. As the day wears on, it becomes a mental and physical challenge. Fatigue like the rain sets in with my body beginning to tire. The days feel long and I very much look forward to the hut. Just a little soaked, I tell myself 'only a few kilometers to go'.

The vegetation is thinning. I'm wishful in thinking the hut is just up above on the berm across the river. Dreaming for it to be there, but my gut tells me it isn't because I am back here on the map. I choose to cross the river anyway, heading for the opposite bank. If I thought my boots were wet, they are now, I realised that my feet were only damp before. There is no hut but it isn't long until it comes into sight, a night passes and a short day follows.

Ivory Lake... The clouds lift as I arrive at Ivory Lake, the sun comes out and with it, a three-hundred-meter-long snow field on the ridge above is revealed. Doubt sets into my mind, I ask myself, how am I going to pass this? There's no way I am going back the way I came despite that being one of my original options should this very possibility eventuate. It was hard enough physically, let alone mentally. That aside, I am pretty stoked to be here. Ivory Lake, Yeah boy!

Looking at the snow above, it's kind of one of those oh shit moments, how am I going to get around that? This pass had

been on my mind since I started the walk. I had neglected the ice axe as the 1900 meter peaks were clear of snow from the road a couple of days earlier. Could there be exposed rock on the other side of the ridge? What I could see was south facing. Would I be able to make it through? For now, the snow face would just have to be tomorrow's problem. I will just have to head up there and see what my options are but now it's time to enjoy the sunshine. With a hut mattress and a sleeping bag, the afternoon passes with a good book found in the hut.

The Turning Point... I knew it subconsciously before it even happened, it's not the tread of my boots, it's black ice as my foot skids out from underneath me. The ground is frozen and I take this into account for my path ahead, kicking up the gravelly scree at times as I place my boot down. As I crest the ridge I can see I've got this. The snowfield below conceals a line and now up beside it, I can wander through the shattered rock. All doubts are left behind as I gaze across at the surrounding hills and mountains beyond.

The broad spur, which one is it? I stop and ponder with the map to ground, I still can't make much sense of it. The spurs before me don't really match up, I'm half surrounded by a cloud with the valley below partially obscured. I drop down to another large shelf of scree, several spurs lead away. One to my left is rather defined, almost too defined. Another begins but fades out into some rather deep ruts. Opting for the former, I find myself picking my way through a patch of icy snow to gain it. I look down and I immediately regret it. Shit this is steep, but then again, the other one wasn't much better. I'm at Top Tuke Hut, to be the only one here, to think that I

have not seen another person in the last four is another moment of realisation. To be where I am, in a place so beautiful but desolate of people is a pretty incredible feeling. Where else do you ever experience that? I have dinner and feeling pretty sleepy I am ready to go to bed. I glance at my watch, and have one of those moments where you just have to laugh, it's 1630. It would be that evening that another two trampers would wander upon the hut. It was great to share our stories, have a laugh about where we had been and what was to come.

The final stretch... I think back to the first day, it was at Kiwi Flat Hut that my journey had only just started and was a tenth of the way through. Now, the same thoughts are back, but this time I'm on the last part of my journey as I drop down Dickie spur. The track is steep and I don't know what is going to be worse, going down or heading up? My knee is complaining, a couple ibuprofen seem to set it at bay. I turn in and climb down, something which I haven't really had to do with the exception of going over the ridges from Ivory Lake.

In the past few days I could have been anywhere in the world but I am reminded where I am once more as I reach the end of my journey with the first bite from a sand fly. The temperature begins to drop and the light with it, 1830 comes and goes. A small fire by the river bank keeps the sand flies at bay but that too dies down. I had all these contingencies should I be the one to not make pickup time but I didn't plan for my pickup not arriving. As I set off I am met by familiar faces who just arrive.

REFLECTIONS

Challenge

Where do I put this tramp along a scale of physical and mental difficulty? Angles by Night, a twenty-four-hour Rogaine, the Franklin River, a thirty-hour traverse of Mt Tasman and Mt Lendenfeld via the Balfour Rib... The days are demanding and the mountains can be hard work but I am rewarded with long sleeps aligned to the setting sun.

Schedule

Having a short 3-hour day did wonders, allowing the time and space for the physical and mental state to relax after the preceding two big days.

Gear

What did I take with me? What was useful, what could I have perhaps left behind? Took a hand line with me, don't need twenty meters, a maximum of twelve if that at all? A 45 litre pack worked well but an extra five litres of space that would have been brilliant.

PLB

This was going to make or break my trip. Without one I wouldn't be going. I now know you can

source them from 'Information' in Hoki. Attained one from there the day before.

Intentions

Could have tweaked and added a little more info for situational awareness as it was a solo hike. Noting the gear list, food and how much food I had for 6 days (situational awareness from the outside).

Navigation

Expecting the navigation to be more involved but the area/conditions I had made it rather basic. Tracks were well marked and easy enough to follow despite being a little overgrown with ferns at times. I do love the bit where the track disappeared completely at one point. After poking around a for a few moments I realised I needed to climb over the edge of the cliff a couple of meters to where the track continued below. I pulled the compass out only once in the whole trip which didn't help the time I determined the broad spur.

Having a set of track notes did make me a little lazy, and as a result I didn't always do time estimates. But given that, when I



did they came out damn close. Be at the next creek (1 km away) in one and a half hours and arrive within 1 minute of that estimate or Moonbeam to Top Waitaha estimate nine hours. Actual time, eight hours and fifty minutes. Moving solo helps with that too.

Scouting

I took the opportunity to scope out the walk from both valleys the day before commencing. From this I could also see no snow cover on the mountains at 1900 meters. As a result, I chose against taking an ice tool. There had been a couple of big rain events in the weeks before which were coming off the back of the two cyclones.

Rivers

A question I had was on river levels, how quickly do they drop? Found out that they will drop just as quickly as they can rise. Another party had water on the doorstep of the hut so they gave it a day before walking out. Come Sunday, first clear day, I let it go to allow time for the river levels to drop. There had been a lot of rain in the days leading up to the clearing.

Food

I had plenty, would tweak my menu slightly as I didn't end up cooking the mash. Drop this off, plus I don't really drink coffee so not much point taking this. Thought it might get me going in the mornings but it wasn't needed.

Hours of Daylight

It is light at 0700 and dark by 1830 pm. It can be hazardous terrain to travel in at night and navigating boulders can be hard enough during daylight at times. If you don't make it to the next hut in time, then you would most likely have to bivvi. A ten-hour day doesn't have much leeway to arrive at the hut an hour before dark should you leave at 0730.

Shuttle Crew

Giving my pickup crew the driving times would have been useful, despite noting these, this detail was left out when briefing them the night before. How long will it take to drive to where I left my vehicle at the start of the track? The time from there to where I was waiting at the end of the track etc...

Keep the Tutors Happy

Maybe let them know...?
Likelihood of being met with a 'no' or disapproval or talked

into an alternative? Take a blank canvas, a polytech student, direct entry from Australia, unfamiliar with West Coast bush, pretty much first time on a tramp which has a reputation and top it off by going solo. This might not set the best impressions. Unless I could paint the true picture, I was starting from a blank canvas.

Wet Boots

Stuff your boots with newspaper at the end of each day.

Something I have learnt in the past but had forgotten about. It wasn't until the last night that I picked that one up from the other two trampers.

Opportunity

It's strange at times, so many people are keen on the idea but when the opportunity presents itself it is passed by. Just got to take it and go it alone sometimes. On my final night, I came across two other trampers, Ivory Lake is a name known well across the tramping community as must do if you ever have the chance.

Expedition Proposals

In the week before when I was watching the weather for a window the name was came up once more with expedition proposals assignment discussions with the class.

PLANNED SCHEDULE

Day 1

Road end to Kiwi Flat 4 hrs ~ 8kms

Kiwi Flat to Moonbeam Hut 4-5 hrs ~ 6kms

Day 2

Moonbeam to Top Waitaha 8-11 hrs ~ 6kms

Day 3

Top Waitaha to Ivory Lake hut 2-3 hrs ~ 4kms

Day 4

Ivory Lake Hut to Top Tuke Hut 4-5 hrs ~ 7kms

Day 5

Top Tuke Hut to Mikonui Road End 9-10 hrs ~ 15kms

ACTUAL SCHEDULE

DAY 1 - 9hrs 50mins (4 Hrs 20 Mins & 4 hrs 30)

- 0740 hrs leave Waitaha Road End

- 1200 hrs arrive Kiwi Flat Hut

- 1300 hrs left Kiwi Flat Hut

- 1730 hrs arrive Moonbeam

DAY 2 - 8hrs and 51mins

- 0740 hrs leave Moonbeam Hut

- 1631 Arrive at Top Waitaha

Day 3 - 2 hrs 32 mins

- 0916 hrs leave Top Waitaha Hut

- 1148 hrs arrive Ivory Lake Hut

Day 4 - 5hrs 42 mins

- 0907 hrs leave Ivory Lake Hut

- 1449 hrs arrive Top Tuke Hut

Day 5 - 10Hrs 21 mins

- 0734 hrs leave Top Tuke Hut

- 1755 hrs arrive Totara Rd End

IVORY LAKE KIT

CLOTHING

Light weight pants - wore these whole time
Light merino long sleeve top - took a beating, too thin
Over trousers - useful for wet scrub, 2 days of use
Storm jacket - something lighter next time
Socks x 3 - two probably sufficient
Fleece pants - useful
Jocks x 2 - interchanged during day and night
Beanie - used heaps
Lightweight spray jacket - good
Hut shirt - didn't use
Put shorts - didn't use
Puffy jacket
Mid-weight merino top - good
Buff
Spare emergency clothes - 8L dry bag, jocks, socks, 200 merino thermal pants, synthetic top
Boots

EQUIPMENT

MSR Stove - needs attention, not burning consistently
600ml fuel bottle - used about 3-4 hundred ml over four days, breakfast and dinner
Walking poles x 2 - need a wider end
20 meter throw rope - not much use for one person, perhaps a 12m hand line still?
Sling and biner - useful when lowering pack, certainly take again
Half a foam mat - good to have
SLR camera - broke on day 1
Sleeping bag liner
Sleeping bag
First aid kit
Food bags x 2
Tarp - didn't use but useful
Mug - super useful
Pot - great
Spork - great
Emergency blanket
Hutchie cord 6m - just enough good washing line, plus for tarp
1L Nalgene
Camelbak 2L - great
Toothpaste & brush
Sunscreen
Solar charger - not much sunlight so no use
Leatherman - A must
Sunglasses - need a better pair that don't fog up
Lip balm - didn't use
Compass - not much use but essential
Hat - good
Map - could frame better second
Track notes
Real maps x 3 - not so much use, perhaps bigger broad scale some use
Dry bags 8L x 2 didn't use
Dry bag 59L - perfect for pack
Pack 45L
Note book and pen - super good, waterproof
Straps x 2 - didn't use
Strapping tape in lid
Toilet paper
Spare light bag
Head torch
Phone
Lighter
PLB
Watch altimeter

FOOD (PER DAY)

BREAKFAST

- OATS (ONE CUP)
- 15-20 SULTANAS
- 5 DATES
- TBSP OF POWDERED MILK

LUNCH

- BOILED FRUIT CAKE (LARGE CHUNKY SLICE - DATES, WALNUTS, SESAME SEEDS, RAISINS)
- 50G CHEESE

DINNER

- 125G PASTA
- 40G TOMATO PASTE W/ HERBS SACHET
- ?GRAMS DEHYDRATED PEAS (ONE FIFTH PACKET)
- 10G DEHYDRATED MUSHROOMS
- 1 PACKET OF TUNA (MUST HAVE)
- TASTY CHEESE (COULDN'T TASTE THE PARMESAN)
- MASH W/ ONION - NOT SO GREAT, I DIDN'T NEED IT

MISC

- 2 RE-HYDRANTS - AWESOME
- PACKET SOUP - AWESOME
- ONE SQUARE MEAL
- MANGO PIECES (PACK PER 4 DAYS) - AWESOME
- FOUR SQUARES OF CHOCOLATE - ALWAYS FORGOT TO EAT
- 80G TRAIL MIX

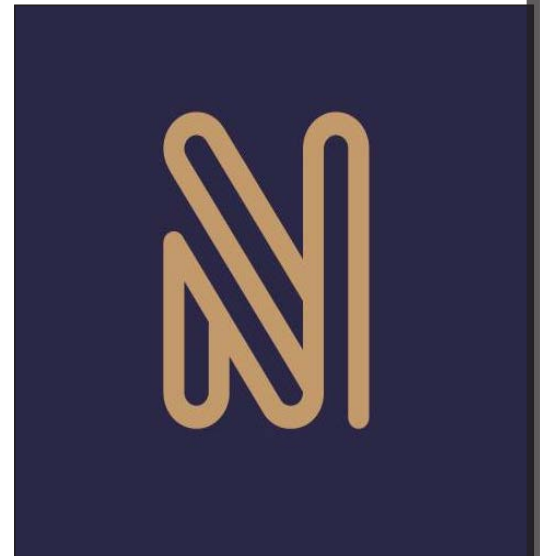
THANK YOU VERY MUCH TO OUR PIE AND SLIDE SPONSORS!

Paddy Fallon
SINCE 1930



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STAR CHEK

Article By: Anon, Photo By: Nick Hindley

As I stood balanced with my toes perched on a small ledge, fingertips stretching to feel the shapes in the rock above me, a new wave of doubt swept through me. This was the crux that had consumed my thoughts for days and, within reach, a single bolt, posing the simple question: do I want to clip in?

Contrary to outward appearances, climbing

alone and unroped was not an act of suicide. Climbing has helped to battle those demons in the past, when the primal fear of falling, even while roped up, was a strong reminder of a strong will to stick around. No part of this day was about a disregard for life.

Risk has slowly but surely played an increasingly important role in my life. Initially I found a quiet sense of rebellion against

the plain and suburban, which morphed into the desire to push and to trust myself. With experience came a better understanding of what risks I was willing to take and what odds I was willing to bet on. I've so far made it unscathed through the small handful of times that the dice have rolled against me, when I found the stakes were much higher than I realised. Heading into the mountains can

be like walking into Crown late at night, giddy at all the lights and noises and not just betting on the family home, but those of all your friends and loved ones too.

Maybe that's why there's so much solitude in the mountains; everyone with their heads screwed on right can see the balance of risk and reward for the individual just doesn't exist. We stand to win



personally, taking home the intense experiences we find out there for ourselves, but stand to lose on behalf of everyone, leaving a hole in our wake if we don't return. I think everyone who finds themselves at home in the mountains knows that the sums don't quite add up, but it won't stop us from packing up our bags and heading out into the unknown. I think there is a way to play

the game with respect, doing everything we can to replace the elements of chance with trust in our own skills and judgement.

The feeling of completing an objective within my range of control brings slow-burning satisfaction, rather than an instant rush. Anyone can get away with uncontrolled risk-taking and it can be frustrating to see others

succeed when I've made a more conservative decision to turn around and head back to the hut that day. Maybe it's seeing fresh tracks on a snow slope that I thought was too dangerous that day, or a friend revelling in finishing a route that I decided I wasn't ready for. But at the end of the day I have to play the long game and be satisfied that I've played by my own rules and made decisions that I can truthfully justify, not just to myself but also to those awaiting a call back home.

On the morning of my climb, I thought about writing a note to leave in my car, just in case. I sat with a pen and paper waiting for the words to flow. But I had no apology to make, no truths to share, no scores unsettled and no loves untold. To climb this route alone was something that I wanted to do for myself and I hadn't wanted to discuss the prospect with anyone, preferring to make the decision entirely on my own. While unquestionably a selfish action and I felt a distinct level of guilt for that, I was content that I could trust myself to make this decision. If anything did go wrong, I hoped that those who cared would understand.

I set off into the cool morning, feeling the weight of dread replaced by clarity and focus. The climb follows a sharp arête, from the cold, blue, churning water of the river to the top of the canyon walls 120m above. I moved quickly, the climbing easy but

certainly not trivial, demanding careful attention on occasional slabby moves. I wore my harness and carried a rope on my back, so descent was always an option if the exposure got to my head. I kept the crux from my mind; there would be plenty of time to think about that when it came.

And so I stood, toes balanced on a two-inch ledge before the move. This was the decision to be made, while both ascent and descent were still valid options. Would I clip into the bolt and abseil down or commit to a short series of delicate moves that I had made a few times before with the security of a rope? As my fingers and toes slowly and steadily fatigued, I looked down at the water below me, breathing deeply, trying to navigate through my fear to decide if this was a gut feeling that I could trust. Do I want to clip in? What am I even doing on this ledge? Neither option meant failure or success at that point. In fact, just to be on that ledge, with the freedom, control and clarity to be making this decision was enough.

Enroute to the next chapter, my 12-hour layover leaves me plenty of time to think about why I'm leaving and why I'm coming home at the end. Mum's parting message was to "take the risks I must" and make sure I do make it back. While I'm not always sure why I'm out there in the mountains, I think that there are people in my life who do understand.

OBITUARY

Les Southwell

*An extraordinary eccentric & MUMC Honorary Life Member
1929 - 2017*

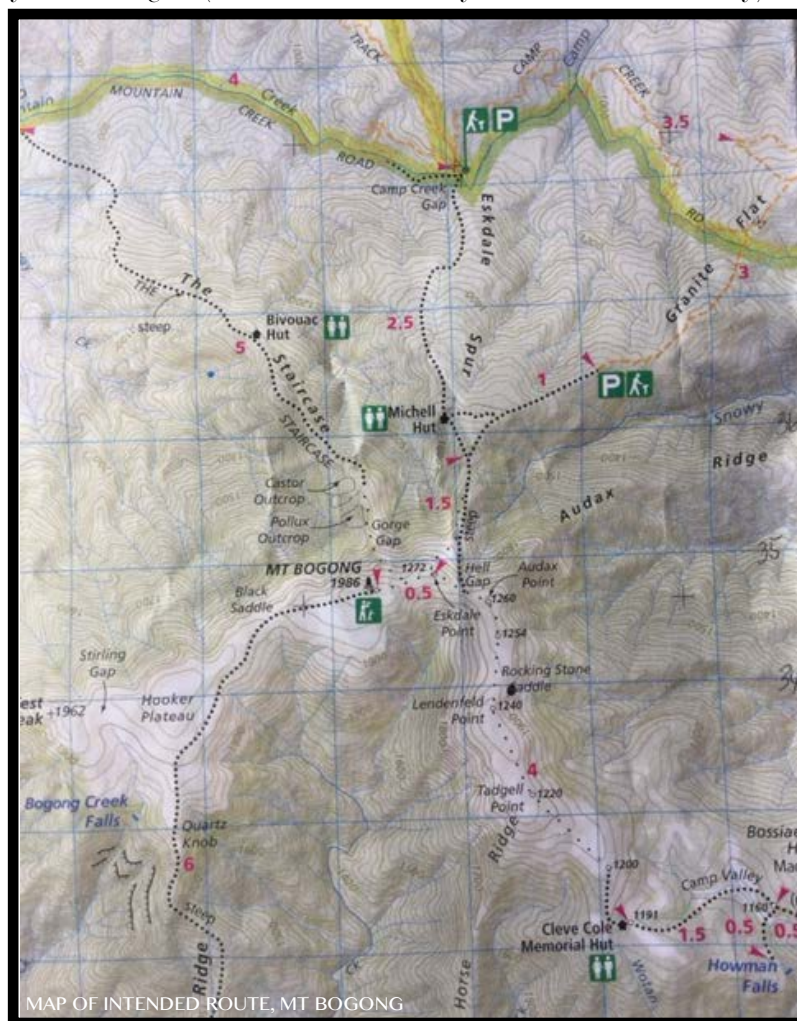
Words and Photos submitted by Geoff Fagan (based on from diary notes made each day)

This was to be the eighth and second last day of our 'Parallel Solo Trips' across and around Mt Bogong, Victoria's highest mountain. Luckily in deep snow from early spring storms the week before, just after which we had timed our start. The next day should be a simple two hour walk down to the car, and we would be back home by dinner time.

Speed difference: I am generally faster uphill but Les is much faster downhill, with stronger knees and better balance, despite our 22kg packs. On days of equal up and down, we would arrive separately at about the same time, but he often sees baby Snowgums, straining alone against the wind and mist ... off with the gloves, out with the camera, maybe a nibble and drink, and there goes a quarter of an hour.

Unbelievable age: Les has never told anyone his real age; now we know why. He looks 100 year old and performs like an 50 year old ultra-marathoner. Split the difference, giving 75 or so? No one can believe the police when they later announce he is 88! Sweating up to and reveling in Victoria's most severe and isolated environment!

We had timed our return this Thursday for decent weather in order to snowshoe the 5km, which meant 3.5 hrs. for me and for 4.5 hrs. for Les, from Cleve Cole Hut. 4 km gently up to and across the exposed summit ridge, and steeply down the last km from the top of the Eskdale Spur to Michell Hut, just below the tree line, but still blanketed in snow. The forecast, via smart phone, was for a decent



morning, but the afternoon and evening with wind increasing, lowering cloud and snow showers. "Decent" weather? Passing clouds, occasional sunshine.

Wind: averaging 30kph, gusting between 50 and 60km/h, but nowhere near strong enough to knock a pack-bearer off their feet. Merely uncomfortable by our standards. We have both reveled in much stronger winds.

Snow: new 100mm surface on metres deep base, perfect; snowshoes sinking just 20 to

50mm, no ice, no crust ... firm footing giving fast, easy going.

Visibility: best early, but passing low clouds up higher, still allowing sight of 3 to 10 of the markers along the pole line.

Packs: getting lighter with 8 day rations and fuel gone. I also carried skis and skins, none for Les.

Equipment: all thoroughly tested over these seven days, and working faultlessly.

Clothing: We set off with thermals and fleece under Gore-Tex top



LES ON SKIS IN THE KOSIE MOUNTAINS

and bottom, Gore-Tex over gloves without under gloves. I chose only sunhat and sunglasses, but Les was in his favourite fur-lined peak hat and (I think) goggles.

Preparations: We aimed for an early getaway given the forecast. For hard men, “early” means leaving at first light, but for old retirees, we mean gam-ish. Les was up around 6am for his cooked breakfast and brewed coffee, plus his meticulous packing process squeezing everything into his unfamiliar new lightweight rucksack. For a change, we had both slept inside the empty hut, so no time-consuming de-icing and rolling wet tents up. I was up at 0645, packed, toileted and left at gam. Since we travel at different speeds, there is no point leaving together. All the same, Les was almost ready, also at gam, except he mislaid his over gloves and completely unpacked and repacked, after finding them on the windowsill. So, as I waved him goodbye, the hut was swept and tidy, he was completely dressed and packed, and needed only a brief routine stop at the thunder-box. I estimate that could have delayed his departure to 0920, latest.

Progress: At a leisurely gait, I arrived at Michell hut in time for lunch at 1230, expecting Les in an hour or two.

By 1600, I was growing concerned for anyone still out in the worsening weather. I rebooted, dressed and checked my daysack, intending to go up to the treeline, find him by the track having a breather, sitting on his pack in the shelter of a snowgum, whereupon I would offer to carry his pack down to the hut, whereupon he would refuse. (Going back is beyond our “Rules of Engagement”, see appendix below). I set off at 1630 on snowshoes, found no sign in the trees, so continued up further the sharp, bare ridge, following the pole line and avoiding the unstable cornices off the steep ridge. Visibility had deteriorated, but was still about 3 poles. Feeling concerned, I guessed he was even slower than normal, so I pushed further up the ridge towards the summit. By 1730, I was at the foot of the last and steepest pitch, gloom was gathering, and I could see no sign of anyone for about 5 poles, or half way to the top. I turned back and arrived at the hut at a darkening 1800. I called his mbl at 1830, expecting little joy, because it is always switched off, except when he wants something from his sister. So, I left a voice to

text message sms, that he might see if he tried, and were within sight of a Telstra tower at Mt Hotham or Falls Ck.

Next Day: A night of tossing and turning led to my resolve to back-track to where I last saw Les at Cleve Cole Hut. I would have preferred to go quickly there and back with just a daysack, but the weather last Friday was the most unpleasant of the 9 days. Similar wind to Thursday, but new wet snow overnight, and driving rain/sleet to penetrate even the dearest goretex. So, I snowshoed with my full pack, minus my skis and skins left at Michells. I expected to find Les on the pole line, having spent the night off the ridge out of the wind in a snow hole or in his tent. So, I left late-ish, 0945, to give him time to pack and get back to the poles. Scanning the snowgums and rock outcrops, places where he might seek a lee, was limited by visibility of only 20 to 40m, approx one pole. Tracks obliterated by the overnight fresh snow showers and wind. No hint of a sighting.

My last hope was to find him snug at Cleve Cole, repairing some vital piece of broken gear. Alas, nothing, as I arrived broken hearted at 1300. As clean and empty as it was on Thursday morning. All his gear

and snowshoes gone. I gathered my wits, and reasoned: if he were not on the track or at either hut, he had had it. I could not know if he had pinged his PLB or not, because no helicopter could brave that wind, rain and whiteout. Just a last hope he was holed up out of the weather and could not get back on track. Or he had wandered off down the Staircase Spur due to a navigational brain-fade. Or bashed down some random gully to the tree line, and would emerge days later, tattered and torn, at Bogong Village. He is tough enough, and has done such extremes many times before, even in recent years. But my strongest expectation is that I would come back in spring when the cornices had melted, and find him somewhere on the downwind side of the ridge, sheltered in some trees or behind a boulder, his favourite snug spots.

“Here come the cavalry”. With only 20% mobile battery, I dialed 000 about 1415 Friday. First on the scene were three sleepless Bush Search and Rescue (BSAR) volunteers from Mt Beauty, who started up the Staircase Spur at 0100 Sat morning to check Bivouac Hut and spread out across my search across to Cleve Cole, arriving about 1100 (what

endurance!). A bus of about 20 BSAR experts in “Steep Snow and Ice” started out from Melbourne at 0130. Local and specialist S&R police set up communications and control. SES volunteers mobilised for non-snow logistics. Improving weather allowed the Police chopper to scan the sides of ridges and deep into precipitous gullies, judged too high a risk of avalanche for ski patrols. And probably lots more unsung heroes contributed too. I was still high, searching quietly, and unaware until later of the scale and skills of the search effort.

By Saturday evening I was back in my tent outside Michell Hut forward control, and briefing the Field Organiser on Les’ remarkable bush craft in filthy weather, and his long-practised knack of protecting his tiny tent out of the weather in the lee of a rock or shrub, just off a ridge.

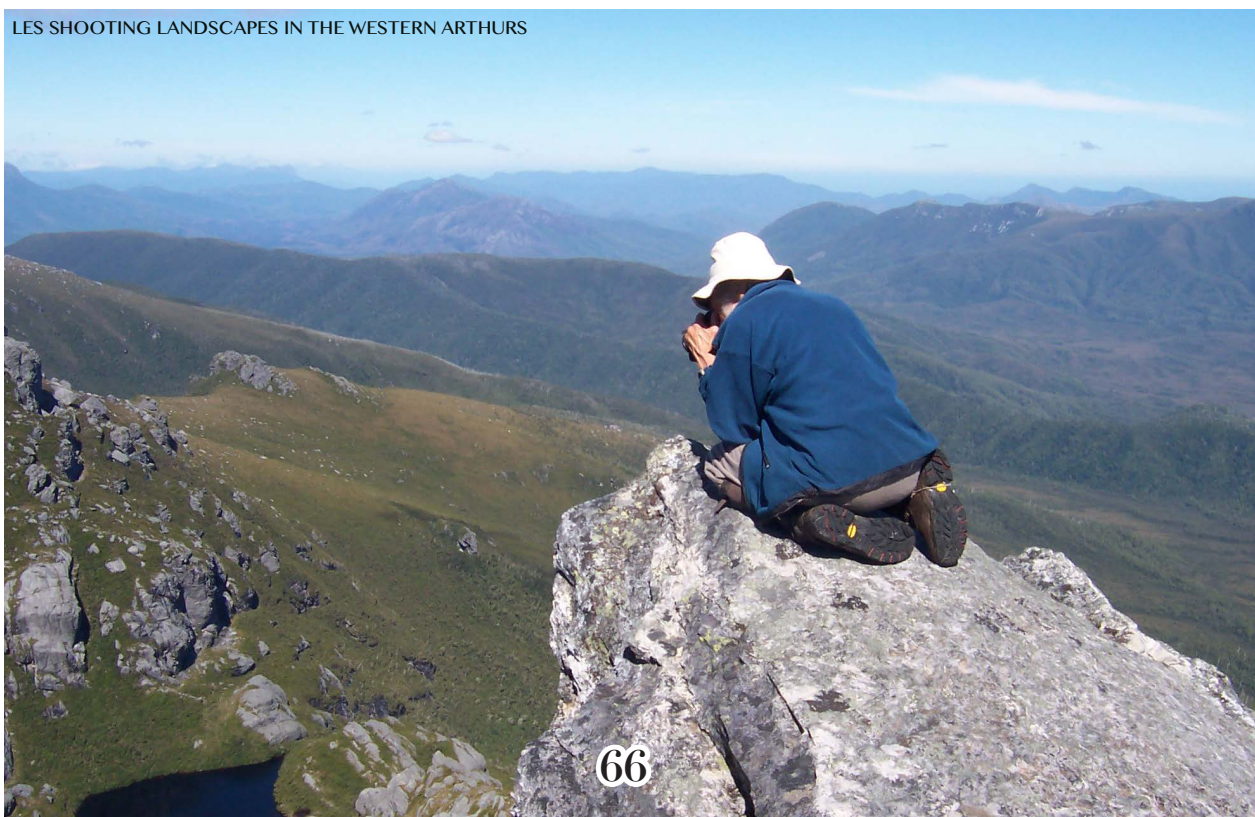
Sunday: dawned the best weather of the fortnight, no wind, new snow, blinding sunshine and dark blue sky. BSAR arranged themselves into line-abreast sweeps, typically five people across about 100m, crashing through tough stunted Snowgums (scratchy!), or down the lee sides off the bare main ridges, cornices

permitting. Running on little sleep, they were up at 6am, fed, toileted, geared up, briefed and underway by 7am. Such dedication! We still hoped to find Les alive, but my hopes were fading. If no clue, BSAR would probably withdraw from 1300.

A sweep between Audax Point and Lendenfels Point, found Les and his tent around 0845, about 100m east of Rocking Stone Saddle, just out of the weather. He had been sitting outside. Vale legendary Les Southwell!

So what went wrong? My opinion: Based on where he was found (only 2 km, maybe 2 hrs, gently up from Cleve Cole, just off an excellent pole line), plus the fact that he did not ping his PLB. Mid-morning Thursday, Les thought something was wrong. Not bad enough to PLB, but bad enough to retreat the 1hr down to Cleve Cole. Maybe a fuzzy feeling in his head. Not hypothermia, because pitching a tent in deep snow and wind requires real skill, impossible with fingers like little blocks of wood. Or after a severe stroke. While setting up tent, a second medical attack was so sudden that he could not reach the PLB in his rucksack.

LES SHOOTING LANDSCAPES IN THE WESTERN ARTHURS



What else went wrong?

A solo trip in severe environments is asking for trouble. All the textbooks call for at least three people: one to experience trouble, one to go for help, one to stay with and care for the victim. But Les was so quirky, that no one would go with him in close company. His only hope of extreme wilderness was his “parallel solo trips”, or else stay home and settle for group day walks on Sundays (which he also enjoyed).

I am heartbroken for his family and friends that I contributed to his demise. But I had even

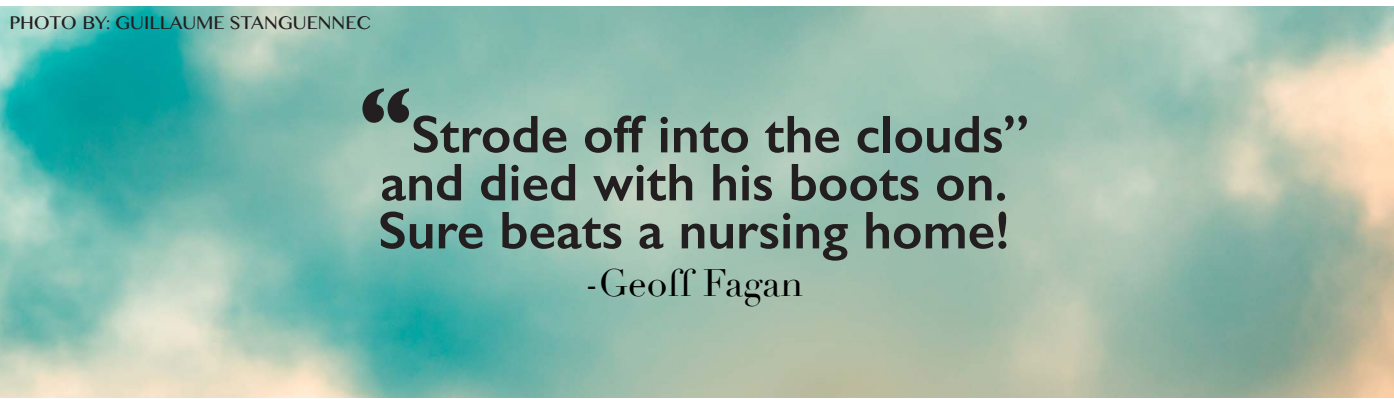
checked with his sister before we left if she was comfortable with him coming along. She confirmed that neither she nor I could stop him, so stubborn, confident and determined is he.

And I am ashamed to have mobilised such a huge S&R effort and cost, caused by my selfish love of putting myself at risk in wild places, and making the S&R pay the price. Please ping your PLB to minimise search efforts!

Consolations: I am consoled by the sympathy expressed later by many searchers, each in their own

sincere ways. One police officer explained that much of the cost is fixed cost anyway (salaries, chopper, communications, buses, etc) apart from the volunteers’ efforts. And one volunteer consoled me that this is what he and his friends love on the weekends, rushing around in new snow and perfect weather. A medical expert claimed that if Les had the same medical crisis at home, the costs of ambulance, intensive care, rehab and nursing homes would far exceed the cost of Fri, Sat and Sunday’s search, not to mention quality of life.

PHOTO BY: GUILLAUME STANGUENNEC



**“Strode off into the clouds”
and died with his boots on.
Sure beats a nursing home!**
-Geoff Fagan

APPENDIX: OUR “RULES OF ENGAGEMENT”.

Email of 6th Sept 2017 from GF to LS, cc our families, on “parallel solo trips”:

Dear Les,

Mainly for our next-of-kins, here is a written version of our long-established system of wilderness walking/ski trips.

Each of us

- ♦ *packs independently,*
- ♦ *enabling us to follow different routes,*
- ♦ *by expert map/compass navigation,*
- ♦ *at different speeds,*
- ♦ *to sometimes different overnight tent-sites.*

We try to keep each other informed about where/when we intend to camp on coming nights, but sometimes plans change. We like to catch-up most nights, or at least each few days.

- ♦ *If one of us fails to appear at an intended campsite, no panic.*
- ♦ *If either gets injured or lost, we can activate our separate PLBs, as on a solo trip. This saves the Search and Rescue much effort.*
- ♦ *We travel up in the same car, and back also. So some mobile phone contact by voice or SMS is needed if one will not be at the final car departure point on time. The car key is hidden where either can find it.*
- ♦ *Neither is the trip “Leader”, and neither owes the other any more “Duty of Care” than we would owe to anyone else we met out in the backcountry.*

Despite that, we each would make every effort to help the other in the event of trouble.

---- Ends----

MAIN RANGE

BY: LUKE FRISKEN

**“I’m not feeling 100% about this Guillaume...”
The reply: “Yeah I’m 100% not feeling this!”**

Standing on top of Mt Twynam in the morning, Guillaume and I were discussing the sensibility of descending the steep side of the east face while we waited for our third member, Rodney to make his way up on crampons.

Thankfully the answer was obvious. An overnight freeze, combined with what looked like rime had produced a layer of ice over most of the face, this was sitting on top of patches of wind-packed snow dubiously bonded to the underlying snow/ice. I was concerned about a small avalanche producing a fall, and Guillaume was concerned about slipping on the ice.

**One of my favourite quotes comes to mind:
“The mountains will always be there; the
trick is to make sure you are too”.
- Hervey Voge**

And so, we move on, change our plans; the exploration of the Main Range on skis continues! Guillaume points towards Tenison Woods Knoll, two tracks snake their way down it's attractive and steep looking North-East face. I'm dubious, but Guillaume seems excited, so we decided to check it out. Ten minutes later, pulling into the saddle, our skis suddenly stop chattering over the ice. “Corn! Corn! Corn!” - The “deluxe” bounty of the spring backcountry, a most enjoyable type of snow to ski upon when the sun has cooked it just enough. Rodney must think we are crazy with all this jumping and shouting; I quickly hand him a camera with a telephoto lens, then Guillaume and I rush up the slope, skis over our shoulders.

“Beacons on?” “Yep”. Standing at the top, we run through the beacon check and talk about the snow.

There had been a good freeze overnight, no obvious signs of recent excessive melting, all seems good to go! Paper scissors rock, neither of us seems keen to go first down the intimidating looking slope. Scissors vs rock, I'm the loser, so skis on and time to drop in!

350m vertical meters of pure enjoyment, and we're at the creek collecting water for what looks to be a hot slog up a slope cooking in the midday sun. Rodney hands us each a cookie as we drag our weary feet up the final meters to the saddle. We had disappeared out of view before he could get a good shot of us. Surprisingly, in the meantime a steady stream of other backcountry leisure makers had been travelling past, towards Watson's Crag. Slowly the surrounding slopes were covered in squiggles, but I was happy we had timed our exit when we did, the skin up was starting to look particularly unattractive in the sun-baked slush (two steps forward, one slide back!)

Time for lunch, we decided to head on over to the nearby Blue Lake. Guillaume and I had spent the previous day (in somewhat adverse weather conditions!) reconnoitering in this area and had identified a number of South and East facing chutes we were keen to try, and smaller practice slopes where Rodney could do some fun laps. Also identified was the whopping great big overhanging cornice. Almost 5m in height, it was very hard to miss when viewed from below, as a recent topple had covered a slope in debris.

As we reached the edge above the East face of the bowl surrounding Blue Lake, I was thankful

that we had identified the cornice from below on the previous day. So much larger than any others we had seen on the range so far, it deserved a healthy respect, and we kept well clear of the edge until we could see its extent.

I was keen to check out what looked like an awesome couloir between two rock buttresses. A peer over the edge from the top was enough to make the stomach drop, but after thinking for a bit, we decided an entrance from the side would definitely be “doable”.

“Save it for another day”! The middle of the chute was still in the shadow and it was uncertain as to whether the ice/snow had melted enough to make the descent “safe”.

We opted for the next one over, a slightly wider slope in the sun instead. A snow anchor at the top was a subtle reminder that this is climbing territory, but the ride down went without a hitch.

At the bottom, we munched on lunch, and chatted with two skiers/climbers from ANU Mountaineering

Club. They were spending the afternoon practicing rappelling into Couloirs on skis, and had also been responsible for the tracks we had followed earlier in the morning. It's also worth mentioning that we had encountered the ANUMC campsite the day before, and were very impressed with their snow cave kitchen, big enough to fit all 16 of their skiers for dinner!

After lunch, a quick run up our boot pack track from the previous day up to the South side of Twynam. This drop back down into Blue Lake was my favourite run of the trip by a good margin. The big rock buttresses flying past on either side and the sense of scale as you travelled left you with strong impressions.

We met Gina back at the campsite and had dinner under the starlight. Back across the bridge and at the car in Guthega by 11 am for the drive home. Who would have thought, the last trip for the season possibly the best!



PHOTO BY: GUILLAUME STANGUENNEC
PENSIVE LUKE



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