



# THE MOUNTAINEER

AUGUST 2020

75TH ANNIVERSARY  
EDITION



## THE MOUNTAINEER

Established in 1961

### PUBLISHER

Melbourne University Mountaineering Club

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The Melbourne University Mountaineering Club 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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Alex "Padre" Ballantyne

**VICE PRESIDENT**

Steven Birkett

**SECRETARY**

Alex Hormann

**TREASURER**

Darcey Delagnes

**SAFETY OFFICER**

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Charlie Edgecombe

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Rodney Polkinghorne

**CONSERVATION**

Meghan Mussehl

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Taner Kucukyuruk

**GENERAL MEMBERS**

Ruby Adams

Oliver Vogel-Reed

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The activities described in *The Mountaineer* may be dangerous. Doing them without the proper training, knowledge and expertise can result in injury or death. Melbourne University Mountaineering Club makes no claims that information in the *The Mountaineer* is accurate or verified. As such, the club, its authors and editors cannot be held responsible for any injuries or deaths resulting from incorrect or incomplete material. All articles represent the authors' views and not necessarily those of the publisher.



# Club News



In September, the club hosted the 75th Anniversary Celebration at the Melbourne University Cricket Pavilion, the location of our former clubrooms. This event was a great opportunity to catch up with fellow OXOs, who have gone on to new and exciting things. What stood out from the evening was the shared passion for the outdoors, the club, and a little bit of friendly competition. Thanks to Alex, Laura, Hugh for all the work in organising, and of course Meg who hosted the trivia for the evening. Also thanks to Evie, Oliver and Jak who helped get things happening on the night.



Since mid-2018, the club has had at least one Inclusion Deputy. Thanks Adele, Anthony, Matilda and our current deputy, Evie Fisher.



Sam Thompson has been appointed the club's second BSAR delegate alongside Rodney. MUMC members participated in several searches over the last year.



Laura de Jong has been appointed the long vacant and now combined caving/canyoning deputy position. Laura has been hard at work with the MUMC canyoning crew in exile to get trips up and running for the first time since 2015. Stay tuned!



Our involvement with the Regent Honeyeater Project is still going strong, with groups of OXOs heading up for a weekend at a time to Benalla, Victoria. Check out the trips page to find out when the next event is on!



OXOs continue to be represented in rogaines. Former club member Alaster Meehan won the Victoria Championships for 2019 with teammate Paul Monks. Rodney, David, Simin and Gina were among the other club members past and present at the event. Alaster Meehan and Taner Kucukyuruk won the September 2019 "Double Dip" Rogaine.



Shout out to Catherin Laurens for doing such an awesome job with social media updates that we made a new deputy position, the Social Media Deputy.



The 2019 Adventure Grant has been awarded to Robert Springer, Sam Thompson and Mitchell Stephen who plan on completing what could be a first descent of Tin Mine Creek in the Pilot Wilderness in NSW.



Canoe polo has become a fast growing activity within the club. MUMC won the October intervarsity competition, and Aglaja and Brigit were selected for the Victorian team to play at the National Championships, see page 74 for the article.



Mark Patterson has been attending Parks Victoria Roundtable meetings as an MUMC representative to discuss Grampians/Gariwerd access issues.



Thanks to the creativity of Ruby and Matilda, we have been able to cure some of our pandemic era boredom with a set of challenges to be completed at home, toe hooking on random objects, recreating campsites and other shenanigans.



# Letters from the Editors

## TANER KUCUKYURUK



**E**l Presidente (Steve) was the first to apologise for delaying this special 75th anniversary edition of *The Mountaineer* with what he thought would be a late submission of his presidential decree. Little were we to know that a wild year encompassing almost two AGMs and a pandemic would pass since then! Many apologies to those who have been eagerly waiting for this edition, some since the 75th Anniversary Dinner last year!

I ran for Publications Officer as it was left empty after the last AGM, thinking I would revitalise and add to the digital content library on the website and foster creation of trip reports like the club used to. Anyone remember “OXO World”? I also wanted to try something new by serving on the committee, which has been a rewarding experience.

Little did I know that it would eventually culminate with the task of completing this magazine. It has nevertheless been a delight, connecting with more people in the club than I have ever before, and has left me with a greater appreciation for the amazing output of past editors, some working single-handedly and publishing multiple editions a year!

O a more general note, It is amazing to see a continuing undertaking of remote and adventurous trips in spite of certain circumstances that have limited some of our club trips. In all my years at the club, I have always

thought that there was a golden era of exploration that we missed out on. Reading some of the stories here and being involved in the recent focus destination for the club, the Kent Group, has reminded me that there is so much potential still out there; first ascents and descents, records to be broken, new and improved equipment opening more and more avenues. I implore all of you to use the resources available in the club to skill up or apply for an Adventure Grant and seize these opportunities.

OXOs, thank you all for making this club so special. In particular, thank you to those of you who contribute stories, photos and articles you will read here, and in editions since and in times to come. We welcome all your contributions, and not just those where you almost lost a limb. Poems, paintings, campfire recipes, treasure maps, come what may. Send them this way at [publications@mumc.org.au](mailto:publications@mumc.org.au), we look forward to seeing them all.

## DARCEY DELAGNES



The year 2019 marked a special occasion for The Melbourne University Mountaineering Club. Over 75 years since the founding members created the club, it's transitioned and grown into one of the most influential communities around campus and there is much to celebrate.

Whether it be building the MUMC memorial hut or banding together in promoting awareness of the Marañón River, we have shown that as a club we are not just made of thinkers, but shapers. Our ability to collectively create Impact is powerful and we are fortunate to create positive social change both within the club and wider outdoors community. It is these shared and fundamental values combined with our conviction to act that leaves MUMC in such a steadfast position 75 years on.

I whole-heartedly believe we are a club for everybody. Whether you're a finance student or engineer, a physicist or not even a student, you are welcome. The clubs underlying open minded thinking, diversity, passion for mateship and adventure creates an environment of inclusivity, talent and strong bonds between members. It is these core characteristics that sets us

apart and keep OXOs coming back for more.

Whilst the club in the past couple of years has experienced several setbacks threatening our very existence, we are slowly, surely, and methodically working to restore operationality. A big thank you to everyone involved in the club who has jumped on board to right the ship. Our future is looking bright and we're confident in our ability to provide members with wonderful outdoors experiences and lifelong friendships going forward.

This special 75th edition celebrating our history and featuring a range club activities, escapades and laughs, should instil faith that we've always been a club of adventure and intend to keep it that way for many years to come.

Kind regards,  
Darcey Delagnes

# Presidential Decree 2018/19

STEVEN BIRKETT



As with the majority of the President's messages and decrees from past Mountaineer's, let me begin by mentioning that when I first joined the MUMC in 2011, I had no clue just how much of an impact it would have on my life. As you have just done the math, I have been a member for the better part of a decade. I first joined to head out on some bushwalks, something I had enjoyed but had not found time for in my first year or two of university. I soon found Kayaking and rolling in the surf. Next was Caving and best of all Canyoning in the Blue Mountains. The club invested in Rafts and I became a raft guide for the club. Next the club bought some fancy carbon fibre canoe polo paddles, so I joined the team. The club has afforded me countless opportunities to experience, explore, learn and develop skills. I can even thank MUMC for my job. Naturally I felt like giving back to the club, which is why I decided to join the committee. Being on the committee, you can have your say on how you think the club should be run, where it should focus its resources and put into action plans and policies for development of sports you're involved in. I thought I would do just one term as Treasurer and that would be it. I was wrong.

This year we as a club celebrated 75 years of exploration, adventure and community. Longevity such as this is something we should all be proud of. It is due to the dedicated and often unappreciated efforts of

every committee member and trip leader over the years. Thank you to each and every one of you. In these 75 years, the club has faced its fair share of periods of uncertainty and has had to deal with some substantial changes. Different sports go through highs and lows of popularity, experienced leaders come and go and societal expectations change, which all culminates in an ever shifting club dynamic and culture. What should remain consistent, is a passion for adventures outdoors and our environment. So how is the club fairing in 2019?

Bushwalking trips are seemingly every weekend and Canoe Polo has also been very active this year. Climbing and other rope based sports are still on the path to recovery, after their suspension in 2016. While club led Caving and Canyoning trips have not yet returned, external communities have become a lot more active.

A year ago MU Sport hurriedly sent out a draft affiliation agreement, what would be a formal agreement between the University and MUMC. While continued work is needed, it is a step forward to have a formal agreement such as this. This agreement offers clarity for the club on matters of university support, with regards to activities, club storage and insurance. The adventure grant continues to assist inspirational trips; with Jack and Richard paddling across Bass Strait to do some climbing, and for Sam, Mitchell and Robert to explore some waterfalls in the remote Pilot Wilderness.

The big event this year was the 75th Anniversary Celebration at the Melbourne University Cricket Pavilion; the location of our former clubrooms. This event was a great opportunity to catch up with fellow OXOs, who have gone on to new and exciting things. In attendance were several of our life members, as well as members from a just few years back when I first joined, and other members from the early days of the 1950's. What stood out from the evening for me was that everyone

appeared to share the same passion for the outdoors, the club, and a little bit of friendly competition.

I'm glad to have had the opportunity to serve this club as El Presidente. Even more so, I'm relieved that there still is a club, though I needn't have worried. MUMC is more than the number of sports we participate in, or the size of our clubrooms. It is greater than the number of trips we run, or the number of active members. MUMC is the opportunity for experiences, development, friendship and community. No matter if you're a member for a single trip, or for a decade, this club has the potential to change your life. It will broaden your outlook, awaken a passion for a new and often obscure outdoors pursuits and perhaps the greatest outcome, it will connect you with bunch of life-long friends.

All of this to say, business as usual for MUMC.



▲ Steve in his element.



# COMMITTEE

2018 - 2019



**PRESIDENT**  
Steven Birkett



**VICE-PRESIDENT**  
Jack McCutchan



**SECRETARY**  
Channa Dias Perera



**TREASURER**  
Anton Jermakoff



**SAFETY**  
Anna Detmold



**BUSHWALKING**  
Jak Burges



**SKIING**  
Rodney Polkinghorne



**ROPES**  
Andriana Stoddart



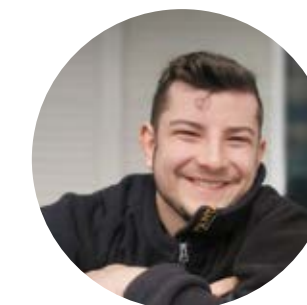
**PADDLING 2018**  
Kirra Solterbeck



**PADDLING 2019**  
Dáire Kelly



**MOUNTAINEERING**  
Luke Frisken



**PUBLICATIONS**  
Darcey Delagnes



**CONSERVATION 2018**  
Maggie Dick



**CONSERVATION 2019**  
Matilda Lilford



**GENERAL MEMBER**  
Evie Fisher



**GENERAL MEMBER**  
Alex Hormann

# Presidential Decree 2019/20

ALEX "PADRE" BALLANTYNE



**I**t was a close race for MUMC President at the 2019 AGM, but I think I just edged out the empty chair by a vote or two. I knew that I wanted to give back to the club, but I was very much on the fence about taking on the responsibility of President. With no one else vying for it, I wrote my name down on a whim. Sometimes those coin-toss decisions work out, other times not. In this case, it turned out to be much more rewarding than I had ever considered.

If MUMC has taught me one thing, it is that community is vital. It often goes unnoticed, but it is the fabric of

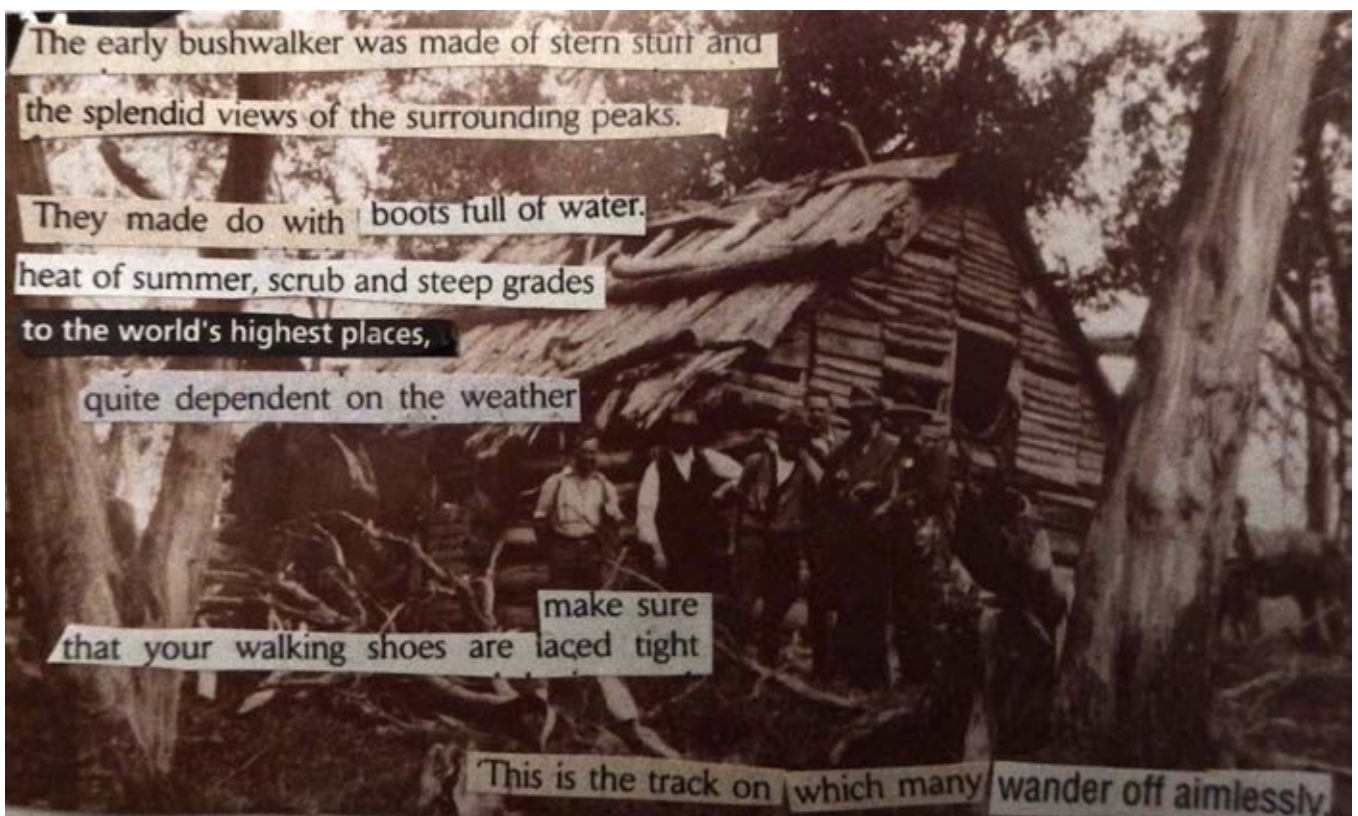
society. We have been flung deep into the shit this past year as a country, as a state, as students and as an outdoors community. It is a time of great anxiety for young people as we grapple with immediate threats like fires and a pandemic, while the climate slowly cooks and politicians serve themselves. Yet, OXOs have looked out for each other and we continue to do so.

MUMC is an amazing community with a long and rich history. The 75th Anniversary celebration in 2019 saw oldies recount past glories of adventures in the 1950s to the new creed who have barely cut their teeth in the wilderness. The club played a central role in the history of outdoor activities in Victoria and the stories of the club live on as the previous generation shepherds in the next. MUMC has helped shape some truly exceptional human beings, whose passion for the outdoors and generosity with their time and energy seem boundless. It is inspirational.

But it is not the grand adventures like those featured in this issue of *The Mountaineer* that are the true legacy

of MUMC. It is the untold personal stories. This club has provided members with friendship, with companionship, with escape from adversity and from the mundane, with physical and mental challenge, with new skills and leadership experience, with laughter and cheer, and with support in dark times. Every single member contributes to the MUMC community, whether for one trip or for a decade of service. I would like to thank all of you for making the best out of a strange year and for nurturing the OXO spirit.

In this era of anxiety and uncertainty, being part of a community that knows the immense value of our environment and of each other is a breath of fresh air. Giving back to the club – contributing to community – is truly rewarding. It can be a responsibility that requires time and effort, but it can also be as simple as picking up a broom and giving the clubrooms a sweep. MUMC not only belongs to its members, the club *is* its members. Get involved and it will give back in spades. It did for me.





# COMMITTEE

2019 - 2020



## **PRESIDENT**

Alex "Padre" Ballantyne



## **VICE-PRESIDENT**

Steven Birkett



## **SECRETARY**

Alex Hormann



## **TREASURER**

Darcey Delagnes



## **SAFETY**

Robert Springer



## **BUSHWALKING**

Maggie Dick



## **SKIING**

Charlie Edgecombe



## **ROPES**

Hugh Mason



## **PADDLING**

Natálie Uhlíková



## **MOUNTAINEERING**

Rodney Polkinghorne



## **PUBLICATIONS**

Taner Kucukyuruk



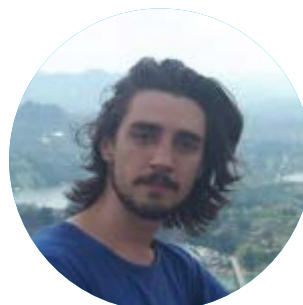
## **CONSERVATION**

Meghan Mussehl



## **GENERAL MEMBER**

Ruby Adams



## **GENERAL MEMBER**

Oliver Vogel-Reed



# Bushwalking Report

MAGGIE DICK



2020 started strong for bushwalking. We had eight members about to commence the Oxfam Trailwalker, 12 new up and coming leaders, who had all joined us on a fabulous leader training weekend at Cathedral Ranges and had many grand plans. Instead, COVID-19 left us stuck in our living rooms imagining the sound of rivers and wind through trees. But do not fear for absence makes the heart grow fonder! We haven't lost bushwalking it's just growing in our hearts.

While we were all dreaming up where to go next the bushwalking store had a lovely revamp of some much-needed new sleeping mats and sleeping liners as well as a few new bags. No more cold nights for OXOs!

As we come out of our living room playgrounds and back into the real wilderness I will be putting my energy towards running trips to push advanced hikers to keep on challenging themselves within the sport of bushwalking and running more beginner trips. Hopefully, this will keep a healthy amount of talent growing and retained in the club.

Training and encouragement for anyone interested in becoming a leader will be at the forefront for the remainder of the year ensuring that as many people can get outdoors as possible.



▲ Bushwalking Leader training weekend at Cathedral Ranges



▲ Beginner hike at Mitchell River



▲ Wilsons Prom Southern Circuit



# Conservation Report

MEGHAN MUSSEHL



**M**y main goal this year was to run a conservation trip with the various sports clubs officers – coronavirus had other plans. The goal now is to bring the values of conservation and stewardship to all facets of the club, as we can always be more thoughtful about our impact on the environment while enjoying the outdoors. When the lockdown ends, I plan on running trips with the paddling and canyoning officers and exploring opportunities with the other officers. In August, we will

be resuming the tree planting trips in central Victoria organised by the Regent Honeyeater Project. These trips focus on planting native vegetation to foster habitat for this vulnerable species. We will also begin our dumpster diving competition ASAP now that we can leave the house again!

◀ Meg thoroughly enjoyed her first Midnight Ascent to the MUMC Hut. At the end, she commemorated her friend's band "Potty Mouth" in costume. Potty Mouth was extremely pleased!

# Skiing Report

CHARLIE EDGECOMBE



**A**s I am writing this piece, there is less than 10 cm of snow coverage on many of Victoria's alpine peaks. However, as the temperature begins to

drop and winter fronts come rolling in there is bound to be snow!

This season my splitboard setup is pretty much complete for Australian alpine conditions. I am very keen to go on a few winter missions and even complete my avalanche safety course. Unfortunately, Corona virus restrictions have limited alpine resorts to approximately half capacity. A consequence of this will either be a lack of people participating in winter fun or a flood to the back country. To me this is concerning as someone who is relatively new to the back country scene. With an increase in people who are adept at skiing on blue and black alpine runs, there is a risk that people may become overconfident without

identifying the snowpack conditions and unpredictable weather patterns that are inherent in the back country. I hope these people can be accompanied by people with the appropriate skills and experience.

I also hope that restrictions are able to be eased as the virus is brought somewhat under control and we can take more people on adventures. I am optimistic that we could get a group of 5 - 10 to Mt. Stirling by the end of winter!





# Paddling Report

NATÁLIE UHLÍKOVÁ



▲ Mixed paddlers from MUMC, MUOC and ROC.

Let's start with a quick summary of this past year's events. For a while we've been dormant with no trips happening apart from the traditional MUMC, ROC & MUOC Mitchell river trip and Friends of the Mitta event. Then we paddled and swam through some grade 2 rapids (leaders training at Blue Gums), dodged a smiling hole (MUS framework in its initial form) and eddied out in a hurry at the sight of a strainer, a big tree crown with spiky branches (COVID-19).

We were dealing with two pressing matters this year: lack of active leaders and dealing with a new framework formulated by MUS. The lack of leaders was partially overcome by running joint training trips with ROC (RMIT Outdoors Club) for which we thank Michael Clark and our paddlers becoming ROC

members as well in order to skill up and jump on more trips. Shaping and implementation of the MUS framework is an ongoing process that will hopefully result in satisfaction of MUS safety standards while keeping running of trips feasible.

Out of the three paddling sports (kayaking, rafting and canoe polo), year 2019-2020 was dominated by canoe polo. Before the unfortunate COVID-19 situation, our canoe polo players participated in local, inter-clubs, intervarsity and interstate competitions. Our team matched frenemies ROC in strength; we were taking turns in winning and losing, keeping a roughly even score overall. Friendly spirit and inter-clubs networking were omnipresent during all events — often you could find MUMC & ROC playing rounds of 500

together in between games or in the campsite. Overall more than 30 people have participated in the last 12 months. In preparation for being allowed to play again, Brigit Doyle was running awesome rule sessions over zoom. In the near future we are looking at co-hosting an inter-club competition with ROC.

Although there weren't many whitewater trips happening this year, we were not idle. MUMC and ROC paddling officers and deputies have been cooperating closely, developing white water training materials and running theory sessions. I hope we will keep up this trend and am looking forward to the future trips. More funding has been allocated to upskilling and training of leaders, so if you are interested, don't hesitate to get in touch!



▲ Nagambie Spring 2019 Canoe Polo competition.  
Photo: John Penders



▲ Helming the "Black Pearl" on Macalister River, March 2020. Photo: Natálie Uhlíková

# Mountaineering Report

RODNEY POLKINGHORNE



There is only one thing to report this year: the mountaineering club is allowed to do that again!

MUMC has a long history in the mountains, which was put on hold in 2015. At that point, Stu Holloway had built the premier climbing organisation in Australasia. The summer alpine camp had a dozen participants, a mass that ensured there would be people to climb with next year, and the time and money spent developing experience this year would lead to a big and exciting future in the mountains.

So how do we get back there? Stu was one of a kind, and MUMC won't return to the Balfour Face for a while. For now, mountaineering with MUMC will involve lots of people spending lots of time in crampons on moderate terrain — but don't worry, the easiest mountains are mind blowing by any normal standard.

My hope was to return to the mountains for the Remarkables Ice Festival in August. The coronavirus pandemic makes it unlikely to happen then, but it will happen. In the meantime, get fit and save your money. We'll get organised once the club can meet again.



▲ High Alpine Skills Course with NZAC (New Zealand Alpine Club). Photo: Paul Rogers

# Ropes Report

HUGH MASON



A lot of progress was made with rock climbing last year, especially regarding how members enter the rock climbing framework. It means now we have an established pathway for members with past rock climbing experience to enter, and this has led to a number of new faces joining the ranks. For this year we hope to continue this momentum, and with work from dedicated members and MUS, we're looking to make the framework more user friendly, and update the documentation for ease of use. This will mean a much safer transition between levels of the framework, and allow more entry

points for experienced climbers to participate.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has cut our climbing season short (like with all sports), and we'll be taking precautions to make sure the sport is conducted in a safe manner for members once we can run trips again.

In other news, we've been pushing for the reestablishment of canyoning and caving this year after a long hiatus. I would like to thank everyone who has been involved with making this possible. More information will be available in the coming months. Stay safe and keep climbing.



# A BRIEF HISTORY

DAVID HOGG

The Melbourne University Mountaineering Club began its life at a meeting held on 9 October 1944 when World War II was still in progress. It was founded largely through the efforts of Niall Brennan, who was elected to the position of Secretary at the Club's first Annual General Meeting on 11 May 1945. Professor Thomas Cherry was elected as President and a formal Constitution was adopted.

With Australia recovering from the impacts of the War, the first couple of years of the Club's life saw only a modest level of activity, but this changed in 1947 when Bill Bewsher

joined the Club. Due largely to the efforts of Professor Cherry and Bill Bewsher, in the next few years the Club was responsible for the introduction of organised rockclimbing to Victoria and played a key role, along with the Hobart Walking Club and the Geelong College Exploration Society, in opening up the Federation Peak area of Southwest Tasmania to bushwalking. It also initiated its annual 24 Hour Walk, and assumed an active role in the Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs, particularly in relation to establishing the Federation's search and rescue function at a time when

the Victorian police force was limited in such expertise.

During the mid 1950s, the level of adventurous activities declined, due in part to the introduction of compulsory National Service which occupied many Club members during the summer vacation. That period nevertheless saw the first visits by Club members to New Zealand for serious mountaineering, but also its first mountaineering tragedy when John Young, John Vidulich and John Hammond (a non-member) died while attempting a traverse of Mount Cook. One of the Club's early New Zealand mountaineers, Faye Kerr, went on to become one of the world's most accomplished female mountaineers until her untimely death due to illness in India in 1980.

The early 1960s saw a new crop of enthusiastic members join the Club and embark on a number of ambitious projects to the benefit of both the Club and the wider bushwalking and mountaineering community. These included the publication of *Equipment for Mountaineering* (and *Bushwalking*) and the *Guide to the Victorian Alps*, both of which sold well within and outside the Club and ran to several editions. The most significant project of the 1960s was the building of the Club's hut on Mount Feathertop, conceived as a memorial to two Club members, Doug Hatt and Russell Judge, who died on Mount Cook in January 1965. The hut was designed by Peter Kneen and its building involved a major effort by many Club members who carried the building materials several kilometres to the site.

During the 1960s, the Club expanded its activities from bushwalking, rockclimbing and the occasional caving trip to include alpine climbing, ski touring and canoeing. It extended the 24 Hour Walk concept to become an intervarsity 'orienteering' competition (akin to contemporary rogaining) and several of its members were instrumental in the establishment



▲ Trig Point on Mt Disappointment.  
March 1962. Phil Whilly Collection





▲ Phil Whilly Collection

of traditional orienteering in Victoria and Australia.

Conservation issues began to attract the interest of Club members, particularly the proposed flooding of Lake Pedder which was a popular destination for Club members in summer. During the late 1960s and the 1970s, several Club members became active in the affairs of the Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs, holding office bearer or convenor positions and playing key roles in establishing the Federation's newsletter, managing the Federation's own Feathertop Hut project, and organising a public rally in support of an alpine national park. It continued to play a major role in the Federation's search and rescue activities.

From the 1970s onwards, community interest in outdoor recreation began to increase rapidly, as did the number of clubs catering for this interest and the number of commercial organisations servicing the outdoor recreation

market. Publications which served the wider community were now being produced commercially and there was a declining role for the Club in this area. Places such as Southwest Tasmania, which the Club was instrumental in opening up, were now attracting many walkers, and no longer held the same aura of exploration. With long-distance travel becoming cheaper and easier, however, other opportunities in Australia and overseas were offering Club members new sorts of adventures.

Most of the established activities in the Club continued during its later decades, with occasional new ones added, such as canoe polo, canyoning and proactive conservation activities such as tree planting and threatened species surveys. Having provided the impetus for the establishment of rogaining by others during the 1970s, the annual 24 Hour Walk diminished in importance and was gone from the Club's program by 1989. Throughout its later decades, the Club remained one

of the largest at the University and, despite peaks and troughs in some of its activities, continued to remain vibrant overall.

For many of its members, MUMC has been much more than a recreational club that just provided a break from the routine of academic study. For some, the experiences through the Club have been a major factor in supporting or even changing the direction of their future careers. Such experiences have also resulted in some members playing key roles in other related community organisations later in life. The friendships that began in the Club frequently developed into family relationships or otherwise into lasting associations built largely around ongoing outdoor activities. The days of the Club loom large in the memories of many of its former members and are kept alive by the reunion dinners which are conducted to mark the significant anniversaries of the Club's founding.



▲ A typical "rest stop". Near Mt Tanglefoot, April 1962. Phil Whilly Collection



▲ Mt Phillack (5140'), highest point in Baw Baw, April 1962. Phil Whilly Collection

## MUMC in the 1960s

### DAVID HOGG

I joined MUMC in 1962, shortly before the Club entered one of the most dynamic periods in its history. The Club had just acquired its first clubrooms, 'Aikman's Road', a dingy basement beneath No. 21 Royal Parade, which became its centre of action for most of the 1960s and 1970s.

During the 1960s, bushwalking was by far the dominant activity in the Club, and an organised series of regular day or weekend walks was conducted, particularly during first and second terms when the pressure of end-of-year exams was not evident. Most of these trips were large, typically involving about 30 people, with transport by picnic van, which would pull up outside the front of the Union Building.

The other main Club activity of the time was rockclimbing but, apart from the annual climbing course, most climbing trips were small, attracting the hard-core climbers and a few others committed to improving their climbing skills. Continuing the tradition of the earlier decades, climbing in the early sixties was focused particularly on the Cathedral Range, the Grampians and Hanging Rock, but in 1964 this changed when Mount Arapiles suddenly became Victoria's main climbing focus. Caving was a minor activity and, as the 1960s progressed, the Club became involved in snow trips including a basic alpine

climbing course on Mount Feathertop, ski touring, canoeing and orienteering. In the summer vacation, the most popular destination was Tasmania, particularly the Cradle Mountain Reserve and the Southwest, where Lake Pedder (prior to its flooding) and Federation Peak were the main attractions.

It was the proposed flooding of Lake Pedder that awakened of the conservation interests of many Club members, several of whom became involved with the newly formed Australian Conservation Foundation, whose headquarters were located a short distance up Royal Parade.

In the early sixties, the main social event of the year was the annual club dinner, a formal affair with toasts to the Queen, the Club and absent friends, which carried over from the early days of the Club. As the decade progressed, interest in the dinner declined and it was replaced by a dinner dance, held at a lively venue in the Dandenongs.

Another great tradition of the Club which prevailed throughout the sixties was singing on Club trips, either to break the monotony of a long van ride or around a large campfire in the days when firewood around campsites was plentiful and there were no regulations on its use. The most popular song was *La Bella Polenta*, a lively Italian folk song with accompanying actions.

An exceptional characteristic of the Club during the sixties was its enthusiasm for undertaking ambitious projects, including the publication of *Equipment for Mountaineering* and

the *Guide to the Victorian Alps*, both of which became bestsellers within the wider bushwalking community. The Club's crowning achievement of the decade was the building of Feathertop Hut, which captured the imagination of a large proportion of the Club's members and was truly an exciting project with which to be associated. Club bushwalking almost ceased while the hut was being built but was replaced by an experience which many participants long remembered and valued.

By the start of the sixties, the annual 24 Hour Walk had become very competitive and there were many who awaited the next event with great enthusiasm. It was a natural progression for the Club to take the leading role in establishing an intervarsity version of the event, and for the competitive urges of some members to be further satisfied when orienteering was first becoming established in Victoria, a process in which some Club members played a significant role.

In summary, during the 1960s the Club offered an enormous range of activities, projects and opportunities for external interaction. Most of its active members participated in a wide range of these. There were always new challenges emerging which attracted members to stay involved with the Club and to contribute to it after their university days were over.



# Reflections on MUMC of the 1960s and 1970s

MICHAEL FELLER

MUMC was above all an integral part of the all-round education a university was supposed to provide. MUMC greatly enriched one's social, intellectual, and even spiritual development. It allowed one to develop self-esteem and important life skills, particularly those related to physical fitness, wilderness survival, social survival, and spatial navigation. It even provided many people with life partners and careers.

Why?

MUMC members were very friendly and accommodating. Within 3 years, this rather shy person had found a place at Melbourne Uni that he could call home and on whose committee he could serve. The club rooms were in a rather dingy basement of a house across from Melbourne Uni on Royal Parade near Aikman's Road. Dingy, but warm and friendly. Trips to impressive bush destinations, mostly wilderness, became the weekend norm. Transport for these trips was by furniture van, fitted with rows of seats that faced one another, allowing much conversation, much camaraderie, much singing, and much meeting of people. Many couples formed and MUMC became known in time as the Melbourne Uni Matrimonial Club.

Building of the Feathertop hut and the NW Spur walking track took up a year of my life and became another great friend-building, physical fitness-developing (some of us tried to see who could carry the heaviest load up - loads of 50 kg were not uncommon), and socialising experience. Mt. Feathertop became my shrine. Covering over 160km in a 24 hour walk was an additional highlight. All these experiences complemented the intellectual education experiences of the university. Today's university web-based degrees provide nothing remotely comparable and such a university "experience" is hugely impoverished by comparison.

After 5 years of post-graduate work in Canada, I returned to Melbourne Uni as a lecturer in the mid 70s. Naturally, I became active again in MUMC. By then van trips had been replaced with private car trips, but the basic physical / social / aesthetic educational experience that MUMC provided remained intact and MUMC continued its function as a Melbourne Uni Matrimonial Club. A highlight of this period was the running of ski trips rather than the desperate snow walks of the 60s. Skiing was greatly preferable to wading through deep snow (perhaps another disappearing feature of the Victorian environment), accompanied by camping using marginal equipment - a groundsheet or lilo directly on the snow with a flimsy cool sleeping bag, having to get up at night and go for a walk to warm up.



▲ Geoff Fagan on Feathertop, October 1968

Another highlight of this period was the exploration of wilderness gorges throughout Eastern Victoria - Little River, Snowy River, Bryce's, Jamieson River, Genoa River, etc. This, together with the expansion of logging and fire access road construction throughout the remaining bush, the formation of the Land Conservation Council and the push for the creation of an alpine national park, raised an awareness of the need to protect our remaining wilderness and opportunities for our forms of wilderness recreation. MUMC was at the forefront of bushwalker's wilderness conservation activities, I became the club's first conservation chair and, in 1979, it was mainly MUMC members who produced the first wilderness inventory for Victoria.

It is said that one's life expectancy is enhanced by having a strong group of friends. A large group of 1960s MUMC members continues to regularly meet today and enjoy mountaineering experiences together, even with replaced hips and knees! What more could one ask of a university club?

*Editorial note: This article was originally published in Bushwalk Australia, Volume 37, October 2019.*



▲ NW BC Canada, July 1973





# VICTORIA'S BEST CANYONING TRIP?

## A first descent of

**SAM THOMPSON**

### Trip 1: Rob Springer, Sam Thompson, Tom Beagley

I cheekily ran out of the office at 4.50pm and ran to catch the train that was pulling into the station. An hour later it was 6pm and the tell-tale sound of Tom's ute could be heard outside; we were off towards the High Country. Our destination? Shaw Creek- another creek on an ever growing list of potential canyons in Gippsland, Victoria.

Little did I know that this was the first of many trips to Shaw Creek and over the next three months I would be once a week in an attempt to descend the creek. Despite my enthusiasm I was facing a problem. The Queens Birthday weekend had just passed, the days were growing shorter and the water was becoming colder.

As we drove up the spur from Licola and over Tamboritha Saddle the snow became thicker and thicker, and without saying a word Tom threw the ute into LR and continued on - the snow now knee-deep. We arrived at our campsite at 2am and it was then that

I realised I'd forgotten my wetsuit.. that would be tomorrow morning's problem.

At 7am we began our walk down the creek. Upon further inspection I realised that not only had I forgotten my wetsuit, but also my neoprene booties... Wading through the creek (waist-deep in places) we joked that maybe kayaks would have been more appropriate equipment. The scale of previous flooding was illustrated when we came across a section of creek where huge logs collected over the bank, almost blocking the creek entirely. We shuddered to think of



▲ Sam and Rob enjoying a beer in the tent.



▲ Driving out the next morning.





▲ Ken Murray walking down Shaw Creek on the second trip.

## Shaw Creek, Tamboritha

the amount of water that must come through in flood to cause that sort of damage.

After a pleasant meander down the creek for about two kilometres, we arrived at a section comprised of a series of drops with small pools in between. After 4 of these drops the creek plunged down a sloping diagonal ramp and over a 15m drop. Rob led a bold traverse on rope down the ramp and made an anchor on top of the drop, all the while with knee high flow threatening to push him over the drop. This traverse to build the anchor would later become the defining test

piece of the canyon; the flow here used as a gauge for conditions later on down the creek.

At the bottom of the drop and after a short swim I (no wetsuit) was getting quite cold. So we called it a day and escaped the creek - limping back to the car with our tails between our legs but thankfully to a thoughtful brew prepared by Tom. Subsequent trips showed us how incredibly lucky we had been to catch the creek for the first time on a low-flow day.

### Trip 2: Rob Springer, Ken Murray

The next weekend Rob and Ken ventured back into the creek and were met with more snow than the previous trip. They had only a 2WD and were forced to park quite a distance from the put-in. Despite this, they struggled on a 5km walk through the snow before entering the creek which was covered in a thin icy layer. Breaking through the ice with their elbows they made it only 1km down the creek before turning around and returning to the car.



▲ Rob at the bottom of one of the slides in the creek.



▲ Rob abseiling over the first drop while taking a cumec of water to the chest.



### Trip 3: Sam Thompson, Keith Chatterton

When I spoke to Keith about coming to Shaw Creek I neglected to mention the details including snow and icy sheets covering the creek. I made the promise of an untold canyoning goldmine. Thankfully, Shaw Creek delivered on my promise. By the time we made this third trip, seasonal road closures meant we could no longer start at the creek head. From now on we were forced to walk from a locked gate which added a significant amount of wet scrub bashing through the snow before even beginning the walk-in. For this reason we decided to walk wearing our wetsuits (5mm and 7mm).

After passing the first waterfall I noted that the flow was significantly higher than the first trip. It had been snowing heavily all night, and the warming sun was now hitting

the 40km<sup>2</sup> catchment above us, and turning it all into snowmelt. Water raged down over small drops and turned them into terrifying obstacles. Further down the creek we came to the second main drop (30m).

The water from the creek charged over this drop, forming a near perfect cylinder of water. At the end of its fall, a sharp rock received the full impact force of the water, driving it sideways at an impressive speed. The noise was thunderous, and impossible to communicate over, even with well defined whistle signals. We called this pitch “the sledgehammer”.

Downstream of this drop, the horizon gave way to a gorge that dropped away so quickly that from the top we couldn’t see any of the features of the gorge - let alone the bottom. Looking on our map, it indicated the gorge drops over 200m in the same horizontal distance. The canyon was

just getting started. By this time it was lunchtime and we had reached our turnaround time.

### Trip 4: Sam Thompson, Luke Frisken, Mitch Stephen

The next trip was a bit of a gamble, with a low pressure system hanging around Luke, Mitch and I left on an early Friday night after work and hoped that the forecasted rain was going to be thin enough to allow us to get down the next section of Gorge. We would have to leave super early, and save weight and space in our packs to make better time.

When we arrived at our camp, it was puking down with snow, and we decided to drive higher up the Plateau to observe the size of the creek near Arbuckle Junction (over 6km



▲ Sam Thompson abseiling the second main drop in flood.



▲ The first image of the upper Shaw Creek Gorge.





▲ Sam Thompson and Mitch Stephen skiing into Shaws Creek along Dingo Hill Track.



▲ Keith at the top of the sledgehammer in Shaw Creek (30m)

upstream). When we arrived, we were shocked. The normally negotiable stream looked more like a river. We decided then and there that we weren't canyoning, but would instead walk in from a different angle and try to get a look at the gorge. We also had our skis in the car, and we decided that this time we would make use of them to get to the end of the trailhead - and the start of the bushbash.

Incidentally, in the process of bushbashing we found a much quicker walk in which meant we were able to get from locked gate to the start of this gorge in under an hour - bypassing the upper sections of creek entirely.

## Trip 5: Sam Thompson, Lauren Hayes

A whole week went by without rain, meaning the snowpack would be light enough to enter the gorge. Lauren and I drove up on another foggy Friday night. After hitting a kangaroo, we arrived at the locked gate, and crawled into our tents - eager and nervous for the next day. What followed was nothing short of Canyoning Bliss. After the initial abseil into the gorge, 4 back to back 30m pitches of beautiful balancy abseils followed. We had to take a great amount of care near the end of each pitch to avoid slipping and taking a pendulum swing into the raging creek next to us. Down and down we went, and eventually we were spat out at the bottom of the gorge atop a large (20m) waterfall into a deep pool. At the bottom of this pool

were a series of large and intimidating rapids, followed by a rather awkward downclimb into the crux of the gorge.

A 10m long section of flowing water poured over the final 15m abseil that would allow us to escape the gorge. To pass this safely we had to jump into the flow, and swim aggressively for a large eddy on the other side. At the bottom of the final pitch we still faced a long walk back to the car, and over 600m of elevation.

We emerged from the car on dusk and a thought popped into my head: maybe this was to be a summer canyon after all.

Further trips revealed another two waterfalls downstream of the gorge, as the creek continues on down to join the Caledonia. It is truly unique due to its immense catchment size and remoteness. It is surely one of the best canyoning trips in Victoria, and will undoubtedly become a very popular trip in summer. At the time of writing, a few anchors have been ripped out of the gorge by floodwaters and need replacing. It will soon be rigged as a pull through trip and able to survive high flow flood events.



▲ Lauren climbs down towards the rapids, inside the gorge.



# LIFE IS UNCERTAIN. GO ADVENTURE.

Hi there!

**M**y name is Melina Schaller and I was an exchange student at Uni Melbourne. I spent my 5th semester there, and did some subjects related to environmental sciences, because that is what I study at home. I live in Switzerland, in a city not far from the Alps. I love to be outdoors, am interested in wildlife, plants and sports. When I read a post from another student of my university who went to Melbourne, I found a paragraph about MUMC. I then decided I wanted to join the club, and so I did and I do no regret it. As I participated in many club trips, I am writing about my experiences as an exchange student in MUMC.

So what does MUMC do? Pretty much everything outdoorsy you can imagine. There are trips guided by experienced people (trip leaders) going out almost every weekend. The trips are for different levels of fitness and knowledge and can be one or several days long. You usually get some people with cars and drive to one of the amazing National Parks to enjoy

Bushwalking, Caving, Canyoning, Rafting, Kayaking, Mountaineering (wow bet you didn't expect that?!), XC Skiing, Rogaining, Rock Climbing or Conservation work. On top of that, there are social events every week like the pub night and social climbing, and other activities like canoe polo. The Club also participates in Bush Search and Rescue and supports club members who want to do further training in safety skills.

Now let us have a closer look on what can you experience there. Many amazing trips! For example, a very relaxed top rope climbing trip to Arapiles for beginner climbers. To be honest, I am a bit afraid of heights, but the trip leaders Calla and Channa did a great job at explaining and demonstrating techniques and making sure everyone was safe. After my friends threatened not to let me down until I stopped staring at the wall and appreciated the scenery, I finally enjoyed the great view that every climb rewarded me with — a view of the surrounding flat landscape, blanketed in yellow canola fields.

In the middle of all this incredible flatness, Mount Arapiles rises, home to impressive pinkish rocks. The mecca of climbing, they say.

Another example was the Mitchell River trip. It was a rafting and kayaking trip with ROC (RMIT Outdoor Club) and MUOC (Monash University Outdoor Club) members and of course, MUMC members. As a fleet of seven rafts and a crowd of kayaks, we spent two days on the sometimes calm, sometimes wild Mitchell River. There was also some pirating involved, as one had to steal the mascot Oscar, a teddy one-armed meerkat, from the other boats and have him as the captain. Beware of the people from Iceland; they were the most vicious pirates. Spoiler, MUMC is not bad at having little parties around campfires, they definitely delivered on the Mitchell River trip.

.... Not to forget the hiking trip to Mount Baw Baw. You walk (or plod on the snow) to the Mushroom rocks- Gigantic rock mushrooms in the serenity of a eucalypt forest- through the beautiful high plains of Baw Baw National Park. Well, serenity is a



▲ Learning to climb at Arapiles.



▲ Tree Planting with the Regent Honeyeater Project.





▲ Camping near MUMC Hut.

thing you will only experience if the cockatoos shut up.

For you crazy ones, the craziest club trip is called Midnight ascent and takes place in winter. The idea is to hike up a very steep mountain on Friday at midnight, guided by the full moon. The destination is the MUMC hut. Participants slog up the north-west spur carrying up food to make a 3-course meal completely from scratch and a costume. I will surely never forget the moment at a super steep part of the ascent, when I had to pause for a minute and realized that the forest became less dense. I could see the snowy mountains under a sky full of stars. It was incredibly beautiful. If you make it up the hill, you stay in the unheated hut for two nights and there is a crazy costume party on the second evening.

Before I start to bore you: To me the club trips were an opportunity. An opportunity to get outside the city, to socialize with a lot of people from Australia and all over the world, to see places I never thought existed, and to try out a lot of outdoorsy stuff. Coming from the European Alps, where distances are comparatively small and you often can go home for the night after your hike, the remote areas in Australia are wild. Sometimes I think I learned more about camping than anything else on my exchange in Melbourne. I collected useful tips and tricks for the club newbies, for all the ones who feel as lost as I did in the beginning

## Gear

- Read the packing list, if there is one. There is always one thing you forget to take.
- Check the tent if you hire one. Really, I did not stick to that rule and spent several nights in wobbly (no pegs), open tents (zippers did not work) with rain and wind blowing in.
- Hire stuff. It is so much cheaper, and you cannot take all that camping gear with you when you go home anyway.
- Did you know that there is snow in the winter in Australia or that you are going to go on many hikes and need a lot of equipment? For stuff you can't hire, go to Savers, a second hand shop. They have a lot of outdoors equipment too.
- When hiking with a big pack, take some hiking poles. You can hire them too from the club. They will protect your knees, prevent getting super sore muscles, keep you from falling off slippery rocks into a river and to top it off, they may train your arm muscles a bit.
- There are some outdoor shops in the CBD where MUMC members get 10-20% off.
- If you have the cash, invest in a nice backpack. Hiking is even better if you don't have back pain.
- If you have more spare cash, invest in an inflatable mat. It will insulate you from the ground and



▲ This possum had just walked by calmly one evening, and then watched us from the tree.

enable you to sleep much better.

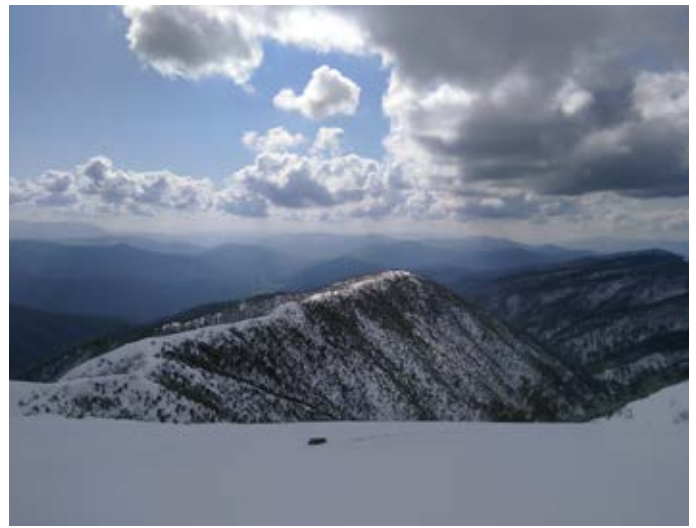
- Leave some reusable plastic bags in your backpack in case you need to waterproof your clothing and sleeping bag. In my opinion it is always wise to pack your dry set waterproof. You can also use dry bags.
- Always take a beanie and thin gloves.
- Don't forget: toilet paper, water treatment tablets (if you think that's necessary), hand sanitiser (nice before you cook)

## Cold nights

- After waking up at night because I could not feel my feet anymore, someone revealed you can fill a water bottle with hot water and put it in your sleeping bag to warm your feet.
- Wear dry socks, preferably wool. If you wear two pairs, make sure that the upper one is loose, so circulation is not restricted (which will make your feet colder).
- Put an emergency blanket on top of your mat, as it reflects body heat back to you!
- Wear your beanie... I was told one loses 30% of the body heat via the head.



▲ Operation "Destroy All Sea Spurge":  
Hooded Plover Habitat Rehab at Wilson's Prom



▲ Looking out from Mt Feathertop

## Food

- Take the simmer ring off of your Trangia.... I did not, and it took me an hour to cook spaghetti.
- Pack some "real" food. Nothing better than having a warm dinner after a day of hiking which is NOT instant soup. For me, it is worth some extra weight to have some fresh veggies. Depending on the type, they will survive in your pack for some days.
- Take some tea bags. It makes getting up on a fresh morning so much nicer. Coffee addicts may also consider taking some coffee instead.
- Get a reusable container and some cutlery (op shops usually have both). The container can also serve as a plate, cup and the lid as a cutting board. It will save you money and save the environment from some plastic trash.
- Consider replacing tin foil for beeswax wraps.
- Spent all your money and hungry/thirsty? Like bulk shopping, but it's so expensive? Then check out the food coop on the first floor of Union House. They have bulk shopping (rice, pasta, couscous, tea bags, shampoo, detergent, tofu, spices, ...) and serve hot meals for \$6.50 for members three days a week.

## My Favourite Recipe

- Ingredients: Onion, capsicum, pesto, hummus, gnocchi (a lot)
- At home: fry onions and capsicum with salt and pepper and pack them in a container
- At the campground: boil water
- Insert gnocchi and wait till they float
- Drain, then mix gnocchi with vegetables, pesto
- Serve with some hummus on top

## No Cooker?

- Call me barbarian, but you can make Couscous salad with cold water. Just let it sit a little longer.
- You need: water, salt, pepper, oil and vinegar (fill a tini-tiny bottle with a mixture, maybe even add some dried herbs), couscous, some mixed veggies (carrots, tomato, cucumber, capsicum, etc), some nuts and raisins, some cheese if the weather allows it
- Take some couscous and pour water on top. Let it sit there for 5 minutes or so.
- Put in the chopped veggies and the other stuff, season with oil, vinegar, salt and pepper.

## Miscellaneous

- Conservation trips: If you like to hang out at unusually beautiful places, with a bunch of nice

people, and do some light to hard work for the environment, then this is for you. Usually you also have some free time to check out the area. There are often a lot of retirees participating, and they were so welcoming and have very interesting stories to tell. They even took us on a hike. They were incredibly fast. On top of that, some of them were real experts when it came to plants and the environments. As a reward, you usually get a nice meal.

- Don't be too afraid of the wildlife. Leave them alone, and they will leave you alone. Let them know you are there by not walking too silently, and they will try to get out of your way. I did see some spiders, but only one snake and trust me; I did a lot of walking.
- Wear a hat and use sunscreen, even if it is cloudy. I got my worst sunburn when it was cloudy.

The most important thing is to try out as many things as you can and have fun!!! To sum it up, I can only recommend joining this club. Do not be scared or shy, just join at one of the meetings on Tuesday and you will see it is well worth it. I am sure you will go on amazing adventures with MUMC. Thanks for the awesome time, everyone, and all the best for the future!!

Love,  
Melina



Mont Blanc du Tacul, France

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# Empathy and Criticism; Reconciling Risk in Outdoor Sports

LUKE FRISKEN

We tell ourselves (and our friends and families) that our adventure sport of choice can be safe, you shouldn't get hurt if you do the right thing; that person who had an accident must have been doing something wrong or was unlucky. We convince ourselves that it's safe enough for us to be comfortable participating, and when some evidence comes up to the contrary, we may seek to disprove or minimise it so we can feel better about our own selfish choices regarding risk taking.

I was struck by the sad news of the death of promising young female climber Savannah Buik<sup>1</sup> and the conversation surrounding it. What happens when we try to reconcile the risk in our pursuits when faced with horrifying news such as this? It makes me think about all my friends and acquaintances who have suffered accidents, bad luck, and near misses in the outdoors. It makes me think about all those articles about people who made "silly" mistakes and got themselves killed.

There is a line we must tread between trying to identify mistakes and criticising them in the name of progress/improvement, but also being

empathetic and respectful towards the person who had the accident, accepting that we ourselves can be exposed to the same risks and are capable of making the same kinds of mistakes.

Over the years I've overheard or even participated in several discussions which take an overly critical tone. I've often left feeling guilty. The person in question often has an idea that people are gossiping about their accident. They may feel excluded from the conversation, and feel that other people look down upon them. Damage is certainly done.

To add to this is our impression that perhaps sharing personal stories of our poor decisions (especially those near misses) publicly damages our reputation and the reputation of our clubs/companies/communities, making us appear reckless and dangerous. It might make others question our personal suitability for taking on leadership responsibilities?

Of course, unfortunately, considerations for admission of guilt and culpability in the context of litigation increasingly plays a part in a number of accident scenarios in our societies, but I would like to argue that

these considerations when applied liberally are also toxic to a healthy safety culture.

I don't speak for the club on this, but I personally believe it is far better that we as a club and as individual members of our respective communities strive to have a reputation of being open, honest, and willing to learn from our mistakes. Other clubs and experienced adventurers may have a good looking public safety record, but I can almost guarantee that they probably have had many problems, accidents and near misses which have gone unreported, and not discussed (at least in public).

Yes it's important that we try to discourage out of place bravado, poor technique and poorly thought out decisions regarding risk. But I think we often aren't giving people enough credit and encouragement to come to this conclusion themselves. Who better to criticise and share details about an accident or a near miss than the person who was themselves involved?

If you know someone who has had an accident or a near miss, before launching into criticising/reporting their mistakes behind their backs consider doing this first instead:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://rockandice.com/climbing-news/remembering-savannah-buik/>



▲ An open discussion on safety after someone admits something they don't know.



▲ Me climbing at Cape Woolamai. Photo: Sam Thompson





▲ Abseiling at Cape Woolamai  
Photo: Sam Thompson

- Talk to them about it if they are willing.
- Be empathetic, be very careful to avoid implying judgement. They may feel shame, or they may not even realise the full extent of their mistake, which may be why they have not told you about it of their own accord.
- Build up a rapport with them on the subject, ask careful questions and help them to feel comfortable identifying and sharing their own mistakes with others. It may even be that you are not the best person to do approach them, perhaps they will be more comfortable talking to another friend, so delegate this responsibility!

## Cape Woolamai Mistakes

To open the proceedings, a story about one of my own near misses a few years ago... photos are from various trips to Cape Woolamai over the years, no direct relation to the people or the events in this article.

I had a friend who was new to climbing, they were very very keen to go on their first outdoor climb at the first opportunity. I was heading to Cape Woolamai for the second time with two other friends who were experienced climbers. In the week leading up to the trip I sent this message to that person:

hey, so 4 of us are thinking of Woolamai, while there are some easy climbs there, it's also inherently a more risky place than somewhere like Arapiles, Werribee Gorge, or Mt Macedon due to loose rock and waves + tide. I'd be okay with you climbing with me, but just thought I'd better mention that so you're at least partially aware that it involves more risk than usual. There'll definitely be more chances during the holidays too. Anyway your call if you'd still like to come, I'm easy either way.

First mistake: don't offer to bring beginners to Cape Woolamai, it's not an appropriate place for teaching new climbers, there are too many risks involved and communication is difficult with the wind and the waves.

My head was in a strange place in the morning as we were driving to Phillip Island, I was feeling excited and proud. I was not in a headspace where I could admit my mistakes to my friends.

We walked in over the rocks along the coastline (rather than over the top), maybe the one good decision for the day, it takes slightly longer sometimes but it avoids the erosion present from people climbing down from the lookout. I think everyone should be taking this route if they wish to go climbing at Woolamai.

The place where we stopped was near a climb that my other two friends wished to try. There were no easy climbs nearby, but I decided for some strange reason that the grade 15 would



be fine to do with my new climber. To its credit, from the ground the climb looked fairly well protected as far as Cape Woolamai goes.

As we are roping up my partner mentions this is the first time they have done lead belaying. This is news to me, I had assumed they had practiced this indoors. Another mistake: I should have made less assumptions about their experience, they sounded confident when they were talking with me about their climbing, but I didn't ask any questions.

Instead of stopping to think about the implications, I decide to continue, it's only grade 15 I'm not going to fall right? Another mistake. I'm thinking that I'm the only one who is taking a risk and I'm stupidly willing to accept the risk. I don't consider that if my partner drops me on a fall they will forever feel responsible for what is essentially my mistake. I also fail to consider that this probably won't be a fun climb for my partner's first outdoor experience.

Luckily the experienced climbing friend is watching this unfold. As I place the first few pieces of gear, and my partner fumbles with the belay, he speaks up, he wants to at least hold the rope as a backup for me on this climb, insisting that he isn't going to watch me kill myself (paraphrasing here).

As I continue up the climb, I reach a crux point where there is a large block, microwave or bar fridge size. It looks well attached, but I'm still a little worried, Woolamai has a bad

reputation. As my only other piece of gear close to this point was a small cam placed sideways in a flaring crack, I figured perhaps I should place a nut under the block. I usually take the approach that if a block looks at all suspect, don't use it as protection; "it's better to fall alone". In this case, aside from some very slight misgivings about the block, the nut I had placed as protection looked reliable.

I spent a long time thinking about this piece of gear, and pumped myself out. As I went to pull past the block I yelled "watch me", and fell soon after. I fell and the piece held, and more importantly, my friend was holding the rope as a backup and perhaps saved my life.

I completed the climb and set up a belay on top. I had a lot of trouble communicating with my partner due to the noise of the waves, and it took them a long time to complete the climb. If there had been an issue during their climb, or had a rock fallen on them, it would have been difficult for me to notice without tying them off and rappelling down to where I could get line of sight. And so the obvious makes itself clear to me, when climbing with beginners, it is best to pick climbs where you can belay with line of sight.

When my partner got to the top, we walked over to the abseil. Many abseils at Woolamai require exposed walking on loose rock, again not appropriate for beginners. I think (but I can't

remember for certain) that at this point I decided to lower my partner down, perhaps finally recognising that I had made mistakes and it was time to take things conservatively. We made it down without any problems.

As we drove home I was incredibly embarrassed about my mistakes. I talked about them a bit with my friend who had held the rope, but I did not talk with my climbing partner.

## Seeing the Same Mistakes

Years later I was back at Woolamai for perhaps my 6th time (I really do love the place!) and I witnessed another climber making some of the same mistakes. He was there with not one, but two complete beginners, with two helmets between three people. I asked him why he had chosen to go to Cape Woolamai for climbing rather than somewhere with better rock, and he stated that it was a convenient location for where they lived. - For the record here, and I hope it is obvious by the end, Cape Woolamai is definitely not an appropriate place to bring beginners!

As he was climbing, I talked with his two beginner friends. They seemed rather impressed that he had been mountaineering overseas, and had told them that he was very experienced. I couldn't help but notice that all his climbing gear looked brand new, coincidence perhaps. Perhaps he

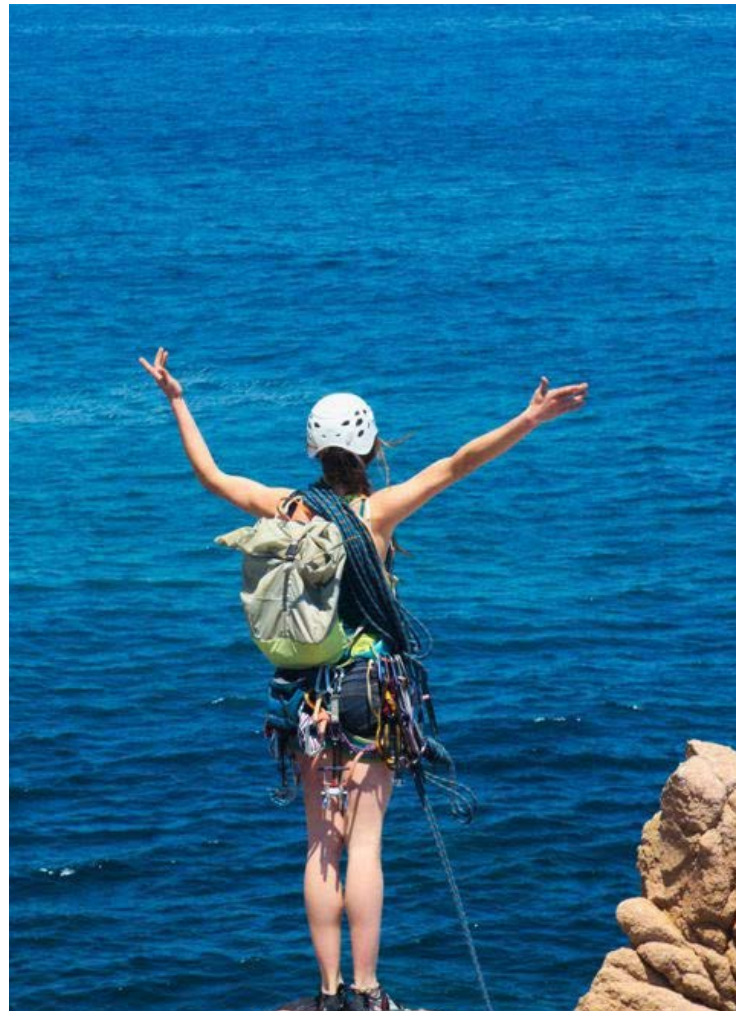
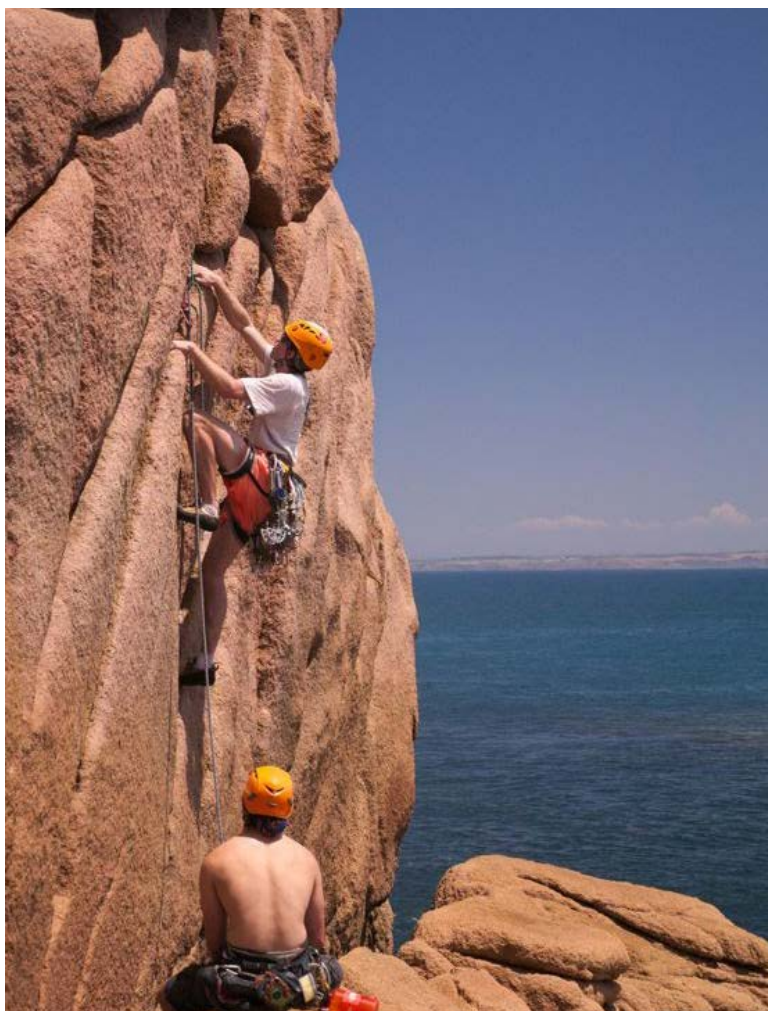


▲ Abseiling at Cape Woolamai.  
Photo: Sam Thompson



▲ Cape Woolamai scenery





▲ Julian Goad and James Adams climbing *Waiting for a Mate* (Grade 18, First Ascent) at Cape Woolamai

▲ Climbing the Pinnacles at Cape Woolamai

had bought new gear when he got to Australia? He also had no extenders, and his rope was experiencing extreme drag.

The beginner belaying had his helmet sitting on the ground nearby. My friend and I suggested that it would be a good idea for him to wear his helmet because of the loose rock above. He proceeded to take his hands off the belay rope and put his helmet on, we watched mortified. Soon after this a bunch of loose bits of rock and sand came clinking down the climb.

The climber arrived at the top and took a long time to build his anchor. He had his beginner partners climb up on top rope.

One of the beginners positioned himself under some other climbers on another route while he was waiting for his turn to climb. He wasn't wearing a helmet. I could hear the climber above him sounding slightly distressed, and I suggest that he (the beginner) move away, he took one step forward and a

rock almost the size of his head fell and glanced lightly off his back. My partner and I were staring in disbelief, the beginner had no idea how serious that incident could have been.

We did our climb, and at the top we observed the sketchy top rope anchor. As we made our way over to the descent, the climber leading the beginners climbs up to us and dismantles his anchor and throws his rope down. We asked him how he was planning to get down without a rope, he wasn't sure, but he decided that he would just "climb down somehow". We watched him for a minute as he tried to solo climb and find a way down on the sketchy sandy rock. He probably didn't want to look silly, but he was making things much worse. Our nerves finally overcame us and we insisted that he descend with us on abseil, he gladly accepted the offer.

Soon after witnessing these events, I finally had a proper discussion/debrief from my beginner partner about

that day when I made those original mistakes, and wrote this article.

If you've had a personal accident or a near miss you'd like to share, consider writing about it, and sharing it with your friends, and perhaps the world at large. Besides helping yourself process what's happened, you never know how you may be helping to improve the experience of others in the outdoors.

#### *Editorial notes:*

- *At the time of publishing, climbing at Cape Woolemai appears to be restricted due to unstable cliffs and penguin nesting.*
- *MUMC encourages members to report all incidents, near-misses and concerns to the Safety Officer or any committee member. Reports can be anonymous. These reports help facilitate a culture of safety and continual improvement of safety practices in the club.*



# Australia's 11 Highest Peaks

## MOHAMED NASHER

When it comes to a special place that combines history, geology and unique flora and fauna, Kosciuszko National Park has it all. The park was designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1977 for its rare and unusual alpine plants and

animals. The last ice age glaciation formed its beautiful lakes at the top such as the Blue Lake and Lake Albina. Its wild horses and the remnants of its huts and paddocks tell the stories of early European explorers, recalled by Banjo Paterson's famous poem, *The Man from Snowy River*. Above all, it's the place for high peaks in Australia that

are close to each other, a perfect place for a multi day hike.

It was during the Easter holidays when we set off for summiting Australia's highest 11 peaks in Kosciuszko National park. We started early in the morning on the Good Friday with an 8 hours' drive at sunrise, the background music was Savall Hesperion XXI which portrays Spain before Columbus's voyage to the New World. In the afternoon we arrived to Charlotte pass on a perfect autumn weather day, we started the journey by crossing the Snowy River to the blue lake (16 ha glacial lake!) and then dropped our backpacks for the first mission to summit Mount Twynam (2159m). The ascent to the summit was quite gentle but at the same time not easy, there are some rocks to scramble and barely a track to follow.

We approached the summit just before the golden hour with rich colours and a spectacular view of the mountains cascade. On our descent

- ▲ Campsite at North Rams Head
- Walking in the dusk to camp near Mt Carruthers
- ◄ Brumbies at Rams Head





to the main track, the blue lake was picturesque, reflecting the sunset's colours and fortunately a full moon in the background, a mesmerising experience. With recharged feelings, we continued the walk in the dusk to camp near Mt Carruthers Peak (2145m) for a well-deserved rest for the night.

On the following day we continued on the main range track to reach as many summits as possible in one day (Mt Carruthers, Mt Northcote and Mt Mueller to Alice Rawson peak, Mt Townsend, Byatts Camp and Abbott Peak), leaving the highest summit, Mt Kosciuszko for the next day. We went down from Abbott Peak to camp near Wilkinson's Creek for a water refill. We had enough time in the afternoon to enjoy the wilderness, flora and a cup of tea before we set up for dinner during sunset.

Early in the morning, we walked Hannules Spur back to the main range to summit Mount Kosciuszko, before it gets busy. Many day trip visitors that get to the summit use an easy access route from Thredbo. Kościuszko was named by Edmund Strzelecki when he ascended the mountain in 1840. It was named after the polish hero, Tadeusz Kościuszko who led the 1794 uprising that fought for Poland's independence. The defeat of the Kościuszko Uprising led to the partition of Poland among Prussia, Austria and Russia and its disappearance from the map for 123 years!. He was captured during the uprising but then eventually pardoned

by Tsar Paul I, following the death of Catherine the Great. He then migrated to the United States and became a close friend to Thomas Jefferson, with whom he shared ideals of Human rights.

After a historical immersion at the Kościuszko summit with a 360 degree view of the Australian Alps, we continued the walk to North Rams Head where the landscape quietly changes. The area is scattered with large rocks (glacial erratic) and the ground is painted with green and yellow shrub and grass. The landscape is beautiful, some describe it as a scene from The Lord of the Rings. Early during lunch time, we setup our tents below North Head (2177m), closer to the creek for water resupply. The area is exposed and the wind was very strong, we camped near the Big Rock to get some shelter from the winds. There, we were able to test the strength of the Hilleberg and MSR tents. The Hilleberg was more stable than the MSR which required rocks for extra stability.

We had a long lunch break to enjoy the view and relax before we headed to the last summit for the day, Rams Head (2190m). On the way back we saw wild horses playing in their natural setting that was a moment to pause and just observe. The two young horses were chasing each other and playing in what appeared to us as exercise kicks, their parents were on the run to keep their company. It

was fun and enjoyable to watch, the behaviour is very different to farm horses standing quietly and grazing. The wild horses' scene in the area was described in the Man of Snowy River poem, telling the story of recapturing a prizewinning racehorse that escaped from its paddock and lived with the brumbies of the mountain ranges. The riders chased the wild horses, but they escaped down a seemingly impassable steep slope, everyone gave up except a young hero spurring his pony down the dangerous slope to catch the wild horses.

In the late afternoon we returned to the campsite to set up for dinner with a sunset view, the sky was covered by clouds and was very windy, but still the sunset over Rams head was a magnificent and rewarding experience despite change in weather. It was cheerful enough to mark the last night of the trip with a toast. In the early morning we woke up to a beautiful sunrise view from Rams Head and started the journey back via kangaroo ridge and summited Mt Stillwell (2040m) for the last glimpse of Kosciusko National Park. We finished the walk where started a few days ago, at Charlotte pass, then drove to Jindabyne and stopped for pies at Sundance Bakehouse. The pies were freshly baked, very tasty and really fantastic, the coffee was also very good, and with that it was a wonderful treat to end the trip. Delicious!

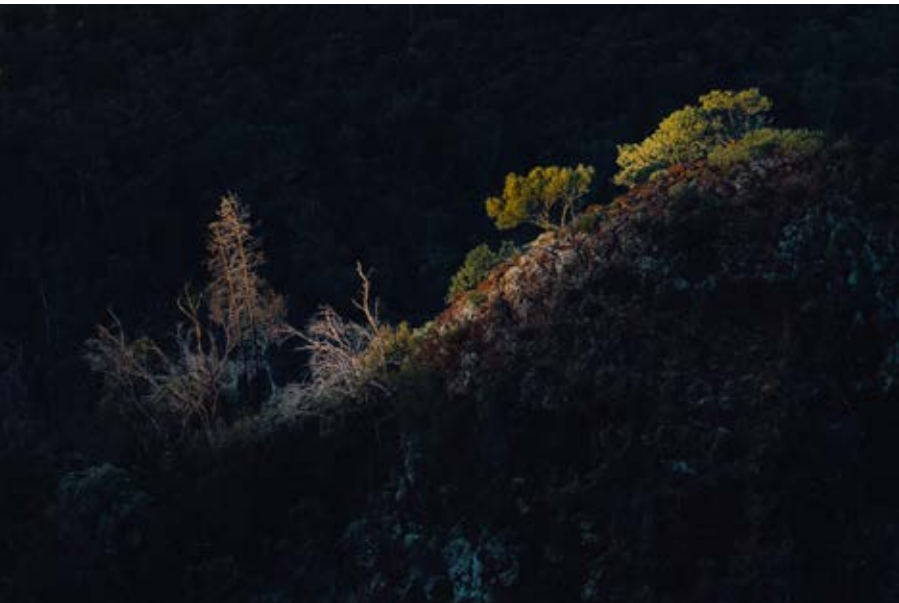


# PIE AND SLIDE

## Our 2018 winners

### **"Warrumbungles at Sunset"** – Anja Füchtbauer

"The last light in the bungles makes for a stunning contrast. Taken near Balor hut."



### **"Hiking in Kamchatka"** – Luke Frisken

"I joined an ad-hoc group of Russians for a day hike out to Gorely Volcano, on the Kamchatka Peninsula. This was followed by an unexpected chicken BBQ and techno music celebration at the bottom of the mountain, and a 4 hour drive home over the tundra in a 6WD truck!"



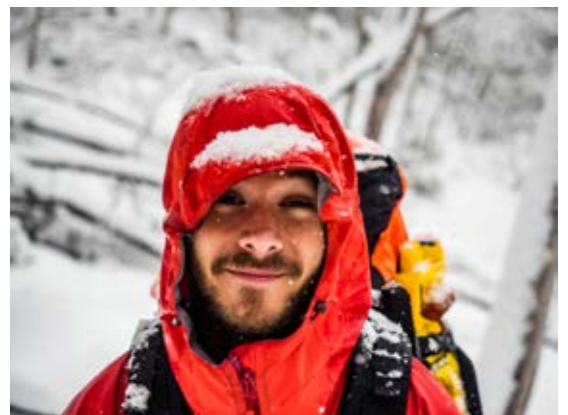
### **"Send it for the 'gram"** – Jack McCutchan

"This wasn't as soft as it looked."



### **"End of the Road"** – Guillaume Stanguennec.

"Snow does not last forever..."



### **"Luke in his Natural Environment"** – Guillaume Stanguennec

"Luke walking up Eskdale spur under heavy snow."



## **"Climbing in the Grampians"** – Luke Frisken

"Jack McCutchan climbing at a crag in the Western Grampians, I forget the name!"



## **"Nicole"** – Sam Thompson

"Thousands of straws line the cavern, as Nicole gazes on."



## **"Brumbies – Kosciuszko NP"** – Mohamed Nasher

"Brumbies in the Rams Head. Playful wild horses, mentioned in the "The Man from the Snowy River" poem. Australia Eleven Highest peaks hike."



## **"Winter Access Issues"** – Jack McCutchan

"The first leg of skiing to Harrison Hut, BC, involves taking your pants off."



## **"View from Thorong La Pass"** – Laura de Jong

"Thanking the god of Thorong for a safe passing and looking ahead to the descent."



# HARRISON HUT ALPINE SKI MOUNTAINEERING

JACK MCCUTCHAN

with Nick Hindley, Duncan Pawson  
and Tobias Huxol

Photos: Nick Hindley



Duncan breaking trail on day three, heading up to  
Two Doctors Peak to the left.

I was back for my second winter season in British Columbia, Canada, to do as much backcountry skiing as I could fit into two months. I'd had a brief taste the year before when I did a year of my university course on exchange in Vancouver, only finding the need to study on one weekend of that whole year. The rest were spent in the mountains skiing, climbing and whitewater kayaking, realising why so many Australians never find their way back home from Whistler.

My friends Nick, Tobias and Duncan, all either working and studying at UBC in Vancouver, had a week off in February towards the end of my trip, so we'd set our goals high. There had been an incredible amount of snow over January which, while providing some great neck-deep powder skiing in the trees, had made accessing the heavily-glaciated alpine too dangerous to consider for most of the month. Luckily, our week of opportunity coincided perfectly with a band of weather coming down from the Arctic, promising clear skies and cold temperatures all week. We had our team, we had our weather window, now we just needed to decide what we were going to do.

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***Our target: Icefields in the Coastal Range, usually only accessed by air in Spring or Summer.***

***Our goal: Semi-technical ski mountaineering in winter snowpack conditions.***

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## Planning: Cheap Beer and Expensive Dreams

Planning for this trip involved a healthy dose of expectation management, with ambitions far loftier than our meagre means would allow. The ideas started out grand, involving float planes, then helicopters, then boats, then snowmobiles. But as the pitchers neared empty, our plans became more grounded, until we were left with the option we'd been avoiding as long as we could: Harrison Hut. I'd made the mistake of going last winter and had told myself I'd never go back.

The hut itself, maintained by volunteers in the Varsity Outdoors Club of UBC, is inoffensive – maybe even homely – with a good wood stove and an incredible location at the foot

of the alpine at the northern end of the Pemberton Icefield. But what gives it such a reputation is its terrible approach, particularly in winter. Once a popular destination, a large landslide in 2010 wiped out a key bridge across the Lillooet River, adding hours onto the trip once the new summer trail was cut. My memories of the hut were of a 10 hour slog, post-holing through fresh snow into flowing creeks and an endless final kilometre through dense forest on slopes too steep to ski up, all just to head back to the car the next morning. Adding to this, in winter the trail can only be accessed via 30km of unploughed logging roads, meaning this wasn't an option without a snowmobile. Instead, we decided we would take another forest road on the far side of the river, maintained throughout winter for a hydro power project further up the valley. We would then find a place to cross the Lillooet River, ski a few kilometres up the Meager Creek to where we could access old logging roads that would take us up to join the summer trail. There's a reason that most winter traffic to the hut is by helicopter or snowmobile – it's just too hard to bother.



## Day 1: The Wet Slog

We left Vancouver early, leaving sealed roads in the early light. Despite a good 15cm of fresh snow on the forest roads, we made it up to our start point without a glitch (bar one solid impact with a rock and a worrying drip from the car's front end). With the recent cold weather, we hoped the river level would be low enough to cross. Finding a section that looked the most shallow and slow-moving, we were able to negotiate the crossing without stripping past our underwear. Only Tobias was smart enough to bring neoprene shoes, so the rest of us slipped our way across in bare feet, knowing that any kind of fall would require a trip back to McDonalds to warm up, ending our trip. Somehow, the water was even colder than we expected and the pain of reheating our whole legs – usually reserved to just the tips of fingers and toes and known as “the screaming barfies” – was so intense that it bordered on narcotic. Shrieks and manic laughter have ruined all video footage we have of the event.

The mental crux of the mission behind us, our route headed up the snowy flood banks of the Meager Creek, making for easy going other than a few small creeks we had to negotiate in precarious style. A series of “robust” conversations were had about crossing Meager every time the way became difficult, Nick liking the look of the far side while the rest of us refused to take off our boots again. Two hours after the river crossing, once our toes had regained some

circulation, we arrived at the old bridge across Meager Creek to the hot springs. All the roads out here are now disconnected and inaccessible, so the area has the feel of an old ghost town, with signage and a warming shelter at the once-popular area still in perfect condition. We were still in the early stages of our day, but we decided we had time for a soak in the hot springs, even if it meant a couple more hours of travel in the dark later on. A resident mouse must have still remembered the glory days, demonstrating a keen sense for finding our food, as well as a devil-may-care attitude towards our discouragement. Hot springs like these are fairly common in BC, but those that are too easy to get to have been made unpleasant by traffic and the best ones are well-kept secrets – especially from Australians.

Over the next ten hours I think we all learnt something about ourselves, the trail to the hut seems to have that kind of effect. It sidles through steep forest, with a bulletproof ice crust putting our edges to the test as we inched our way forward and upward. Through this section we averaged under 1km/h despite taking only brief snack breaks, simply slowed down by difficult snow and searching for elusive trail markers. Only finding ourselves on the marked route for brief moments, some sections near the hut involved climbing up on tree branches with our skis to gain any elevation in the steep forest. A plentiful supply of caffeine pills kept us pushing to the hut late into the night, arriving shortly before midnight.

## Day 2: A Frozen Rollercoaster

Flattened by the exertion of the previous night, there was no movement in the hut until past midday. While we'd hardly managed an alpine start, we figured we needed to get out and find our bearings in the area. Front the doorstep of the hut, we found ourselves with a ring of peaks in front of us, their glacial valleys all converging on our position. Half-buried under a 2m snow-pack, the Harrison Hut has a gothic arch design able to withstand heavy snow loads and harsh conditions, while still being relatively easy to construct, making them a popular design in the Coastal Range of BC. Inside, a wood burning stove heats the place well, but the insulation still struggled to keep out the cold.

That morning, we headed straight up from the hut onto the Rollercoaster Glacier, which gave us an opportunity to get a perspective of our planned objectives for the week, while staying on mellow terrain to assess the snowpack. Strong winds were forming thin wind crusts on a surprising variety of aspects, with prevailing wind directions swinging a full 180° within the same valley. Cold temperatures had chilled the snow to the point that even with our skins removed we were unable to slide downhill on small gradients. While our thermometer showed -21°C, with wind chill it felt closer to -30°C. With buffs frozen to our cheeks and a distinct crunch in my exposed earlobes, we made an early retreat to the hut.



▲ Duncan cools off in the Lillooet River at the start of a long day.



▲ Making the most of the abandoned Harrison Hot Springs, once popular but now too difficult to access.

### Day 3: Four Stooges in the Gates of The Kremlin

They say best ideas often come to you on the toilet, so we had to assume as much when an obvious couloir presented itself at the morning pit stop. A straight shot down from a buttress of The Kremlin to the south-west of the hut, it was an inviting line disrupted by a small band of rocks near the entrance. While we weren't sure if it would be possible for us, it was attractive enough to seem worth a look, so crampons, ice axes and a rope were all thrown into our bags. As we skinned away from the hut, I took my toothbrush out of my mouth to ski down a small hill; ten seconds later it was a lump of minty ice. An easy climb up over the Two Doctors and a traverse along the top brought us to the top of the Kremlin, now wishing we'd kept the outhouse door open to the cold a bit longer to scout our route more thoroughly. After cautiously poking our noses around to avoid the large cornices at the summit, we delicately hopped our way down to the buttress.

Below us was the steep couloir we'd seen, looking surprisingly plausible, a steep snow slope boxed in on each side by towering rock walls. A steep entrance led to a rocky choke, before 150m of

couloir gradually which gradually opened up onto the glacier below. Tobias boot-packed into the top to assess the snowpack, finding a thin wind slab on top of a hard crust. Definitely not ideal, but manageable. I slipped my way down slowly, one axe in hand, the wind slab breaking away as I went down. As I pushed the steel edges of my skis into the ice to traverse through the choke point, I remembered all the rocky abuse they had suffered in the early season and wished that I'd invested in a tune-up before this trip. I kicked in a small rut for myself, 1... 2... 3. As I lifted my boot after that last kick I watched my ski slowly peel away from my foot as my binding released. Unable to bear watching my ski tumble over the rocks below, I anchored myself to the ice with my single axe and turned my attention to kicking my boot into the ice and removing my second ski. Luckily, when I looked down again, I saw my ski hadn't travelled too far down the couloir so after a delicate couple of moves, I was

able to down-climb 20m to reunite with it. Thankfully the others made much less of a meal of getting through this section. From there, the skiing wasn't as great as we were expecting, finding only a few good turns between sections of hard crust.

All feeling a little rattled and worn but not ready to call it a day, we made a final climb up and over to the Three Stooges. The sun was already falling low and snacks running out, so we decided to designate a sub-peak as the Fourth Stooge to justify our decision to turn downwards. The cruisy turns we found on our way down towards the hut were a welcome relief.

### Day 4: Overseer

I'd slept downstairs by the fire overnight to keep it fed into the early hours to reduce the pain of an early morning start from the hut. We set off in the alpenglow, enjoying a relatively balmy -15°C temperatures for a change. We hit the sun at the top of the Rollercoaster



Skiing through the top of the Coleman Glacier after summiting Mt Baker, Washington, USA





▲ Duncan (red) and Jack (yellow) learn that enthusiasm doesn't always make up for ability.

Photo: Nick Hindley. Edit: Jack McCutchan



▲ From the summit of Overseer Peak, Nick looks out south over the Coastal Range extending towards

Vancouver. Photo: Duncan Pawson

Glacier and taking a moment to bask, we eyed off our route up Overseer Peak. It's the highest peak of the Pemberton Icecap region and dominates its surroundings. We chose to forego the more "aspirational" lines that Nick had scouted on Google Earth, instead focusing on the Class 3 scramble up the south ridge. The route was catching the full force of the sun but wind and cold kept the snow surface stable for now. Accordingly, we stayed out of a clear snow path to the summit, choosing instead a more technical scramble to the right. This gave way to a brief flat, then a final climb up to the summit on firm snow, all imagining ourselves as Ueli Steck, racing up it in fits and bursts in 4WD mode – crampons and axes pedalling upwards. Obligatory summit photos were had, the huge scale of the region laid out in front of us. It certainly hadn't been easy to get to where we stood, but now there was a whole landscape of possibilities laid out in front of us. While on the first day we were talking about "never again",

The descent down the east face was a lot firmer without so much solar radiation, but as we traversed back around to the south we carefully sliced out the top layer of sun-softened snow as we came down. Climbing up and over the shoulder of Frozen Boot Peak to get back to the hut, we found the closest thing to powder snow so far on the trip on the sunny slopes above the hut, necessitating another lap above

and below the hut to finish off our tired legs for the day.

Tobias had been complaining about our diet for a few days now and I was starting to see his point of view. The daily standard of oats, pasta, instant mash and Clif bars, which I had been supplementing with copious amounts of butter and olive oil, was not to his tastes. On our last night, we examined the bottom of our food bag, rationing out what we would need to get us back to the car tomorrow and eating the little that was left. Some combination of the diet, the terrain covered and the extreme cold left Tobias five pounds lighter by the time we were home.

## Day 5: Homeward Slog

We left the hut early, turning off our head torches as we arrived once again at the col above the Rollercoaster. A couple of Imodium pills had held the team together on the climb up and now we were thankful for the views we had yesterday since today the way down was hidden in thick cloud. Skiing down the top of the glacier into the South Creek drainage was slow and difficult, feeling the gradient out with our skis and watching out for signs of avalanche debris in the whiteout. Throughout the week we had experienced wind slabs on such a variety of aspects that we knew what we were looking for, feeling a layer sliding out under our feet but not yet holding together with enough strength to propagate. Seeing

a large dip in the glacier in front of us I chose to skirt around the side to avoid it, instead putting myself above a small snowfield. As I edged out from behind an outcrop of protective rocks, the crack under my feet started to creep away in front of me, stretching out 20m in front before releasing the slope onto the glacier. It was hardly surprising given the conditions, but a good wakeup call, reminding us not to take shortcuts even though we had a long day ahead.

The way out was a long traverse, eventually putting on skins to avoid descending too far into the creek. We were aiming for old logging roads that had also been lost to multiple landslides. Just before reaching the road, feeling confident that we were making good progress, we decided that some of the snow pillows to our left looked too good not to try skiing down. Formed by copious snowfall onto a large boulder field, the pillows towered above us like huge frozen waves. We quickly picked our way up the maze to stand on top of the largest one, now realising how silly the idea was. These pillows, normally only ever skied when soft, hid a hard ice crust under 30cm of fresh snow. Driven by an unhealthy dose of Kodak Courage, the results were predictably poor but thankfully didn't result in any major equipment or bodily damage.

Once we reached the road, we knew that the only thing separating us from the car now was hard work. There were



▲ Duncan and Jack take in the first morning sun, looking over to Overseer peak from the top of the Roller-coaster Glacier. Our route up Overseer is already receiving strong sunshine.

no river crossings, no more avalanche exposure, no more navigation, just a good hard slog. The headphones went in and away we went, all our minds on the burgers at the Mile One Eating House in Pemberton.

The car had thankfully been shuttled by our friends after their visit to some nearby hot springs, so we could complete our loop without a second river crossing. However,

we did have to leave a full page of instructions on how to open and start my temperamental Jeep so there was a lingering fear that it wouldn't be there when we arrived. But there she was, after 40km of skiing from the hut, right where we expected. The car even started by itself, not quite on the first go, but with a little tinker and some love it was spluttering away happily and we knew we'd pulled it

off. We decided the legendary Mile One burgers in Pemberton wouldn't be enough, so we made a short pit stop at McDonalds as a warm up.

Would I do this trip again? Probably not. But that's certainly not because it was a terrible trip. The ridiculousness of the winter approach via the Lillooet River, the mind-numbing slog through endless trees and the biting cold of the alpine have only

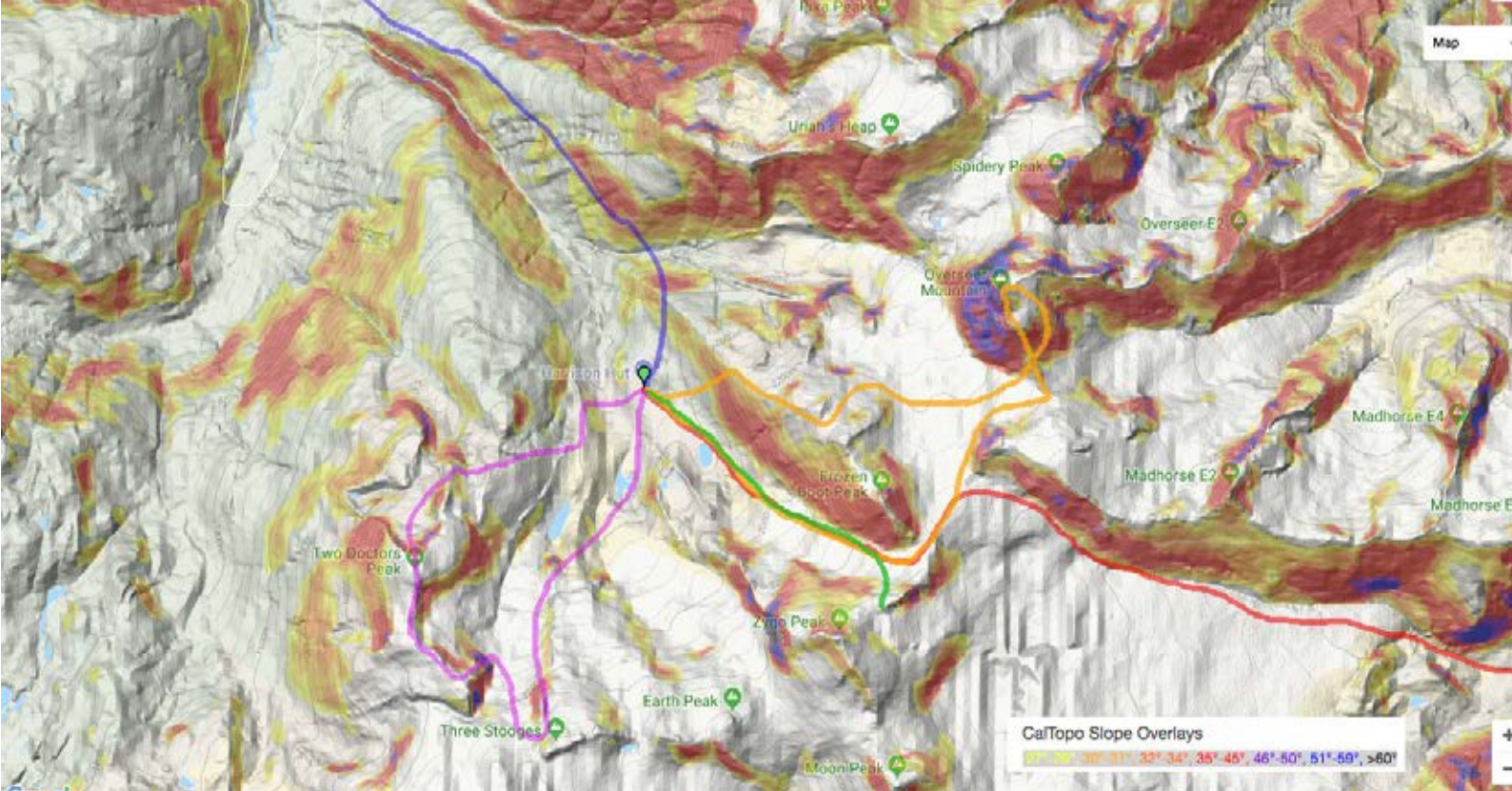


▲ Jack entering the Gates of the Kremlin, wondering if this is a good idea. Both skis are attached for now.



▲ Nick boot-packing up steep snow to Overseer Peak.  
Photo: Jack McCutchan





▲ Day 1 – Blue, Day 2 – Green, Day 3 – Pink, Day 4 – Orange, Day 5 – Red

Our routes drawn onto a topographical map overlaid with slope angle shading. Avalanches are most likely to occur on slopes between 30–45°, so analysing slope angle can be useful when choosing routes for the day.

Map data: hillmap.com

confirmed to us that so much more is possible in the Coastal Range if you're willing to put up with those things. There's more than enough people complaining about the overcrowding of the area as more and more people enter the backcountry, but we proved to ourselves just how much more of

that skyline is accessible under our own steam, as a young group who are willing to try things out and accept the risk of failure. Next time we're looking over the maps again, I think we'll be looking into the next valleys again, venturing a bit further into our unknown.



▲ Making some easy turns at the end of the day, the newly-appointed Fourth Stooze behind.

## Fact Sheet

Trip duration: 5 days

Approach: 12 hours, via Meager Creek. 15km distance, 1300m elevation gain.

Return: 6 hours via South Creek. 40km distance, 700m elevation gain, 2000m descent.

Hut: Julian Harrison Memorial Hut, maintained by Varsity Outdoors Club, VOC.

Access: From Vancouver, drive 3hrs north to Pemberton. Drive 30km west along forest service roads (4WD required in winter). Details available at [http://www.ubc-voc.com/wiki/Harrison\\_Hut](http://www.ubc-voc.com/wiki/Harrison_Hut)

# Ski Mountaineering: The Basics

**Skis:** A standard downhill ski but with trades-off between low weight (for climbing uphill), stiffness (to handle hard snow and ice) and size (for skiing deep, soft snow). Our skis were all at least 100mm wide underfoot, relatively wide for downhill skis.

**Bindings:** Alpine touring (AT) bindings allow the heel of the boot to rise (like a cross-country ski) so the skier can walk normally, but also allow the heel to be locked down (like a downhill ski) for the descents. Many ski tourers (particularly in Australia) use telemark bindings, where the heel stays free the whole time. Our group all used light pin-style AT bindings which still allow safe release.

**Skins:** A strip of fabric glued to the bottom of skis that allows them to slide in one direction, allowing the skier to walk uphill (called skinning). Skins are ripped off and packed away for the descent. Steep sections are overcome by making switch-backs (zig-zags) up the slope.

**Avalanche:** A mass of snow that becomes detached and slides down a slope. Avalanches are most likely

on slopes between 30-45° steep (see slope angle diagram above). They occur naturally, but most incidents involving skiers are due to an avalanche being triggered by someone in the victim's party. Ski tourers should be trained in how to manage avalanche hazards and should check local avalanche forecasts before going out. Ski tourers carry transceivers and rescue equipment in case of a burial, but these do not eliminate all risk.

**Wind slab:** A snow formation that can cause avalanches. Loose snow is redistributed by strong winds, forming a solid layer where it settles behind ridgelines. This layer can be disturbed by the weight of a skier, causing it to detach and slide down. Recent snow before our trip had formed wind slabs on many aspects, which remained active throughout the week due to cold temperatures preventing bonding.

**Boot-packing:** When the slope is too steep or the snow too firm to ski up, a skier will attach their skis to their backpack and walk. Depending on the snow conditions, ice axes (a metal shaft with a sharp pick at the

head) and crampons (steel spikes attached to boot soles) may be useful.

**Glacial travel:** A glacier is a slowly-moving mass of ice, formed by the accumulation of snow that doesn't melt over summer. As the glacier flows downhill, it will break apart when it is deformed by the landscape, forming cracks called crevasses. While obvious in summer, crevasses can be hidden by the winter snowpack, making it possible for a skier to suddenly fall through. Where there is a very deep snow pack, it is common to travel on some glaciers without being roped together. Skis distribute weight better than boots, making it less likely for a skier to fall through. Most groups will still always ski wearing climbing harnesses and carry ropes and rescue gear.

**Ropes and protection:** When moving on glaciers or as terrain becomes more difficult or exposed, parties may choose to rope together. They may also use rock climbing protection and snow anchors to connect to the mountain. Protection is usually minimal compared rock climbing, as speed is a major safety factor in the alpine. On this trip, we carried a small rack of trad gear and a 30m rope, however these weren't used during the week.

**Cornice:** An overhanging snow formation that forms on ridgetops over winter, caused by prevailing wind. Large cornices will break a surprisingly long way back from the edge, so a skier on a ridgeline may accidentally cause a collapse when they are metres from the edge, not realising they are standing on a cornice. The weight of a collapsing cornice is a common trigger for large avalanches, however this can also be a useful technique for experienced skiers to test a slope by cutting off a cornice above it.



▲ Large cornices at the summit of Atwell Peak, BC, Canada. The prevailing wind direction is to the right. Photo: Tobias Huxol





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Midnight Ascent 2018  
Photo: Luke Frisken



# RISKY PERSPECTIVE

LACHLAN SHORT

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***“A risk averse investor is an investor who prefers lower returns with known risks rather than higher returns with unknown risks.”***

***- The Economic Times***

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One of the most controversial concepts in the realm of outdoor pursuits is the level of “acceptable risk” one is willing to undertake. Whilst risks have immeasurable rewards it is clear that the nanny coddling of society continues to threaten risk takers and their adventurous pursuits. A failure to recognise the benefits of taking extreme risks is equally as costly to the individual or society; Ernest Shackleton or Alex Honnold would not have achieved great things if it were not for taking risk. Nonetheless, it is clear that when an individual, group or organisation takes a risk it must at the very least, consider the potential consequences.

Indeed, this is the premise of risk; extraordinary reward at a great potential cost.

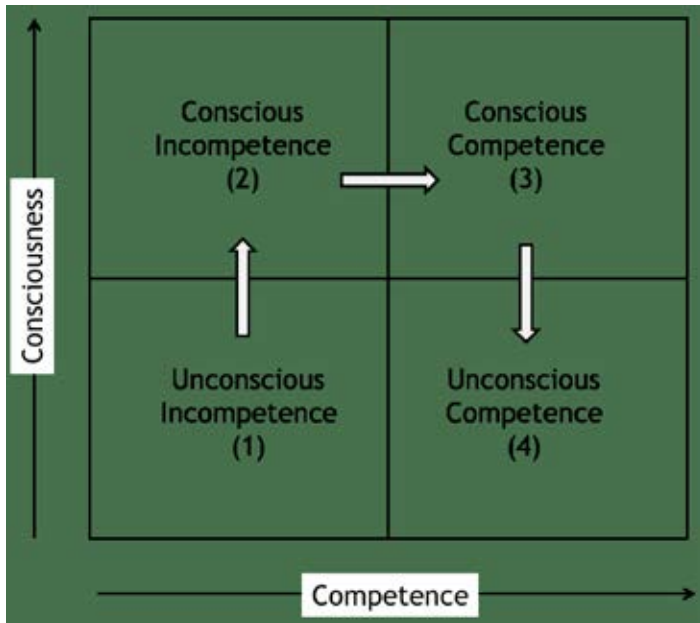
Within the context of personal outdoor trips whether it be mountaineering, skiing, caving, kayaking or any other outdoors activity taking risk is often acceptable until something goes wrong. In many regards, “risk management” reaches a point when it becomes a nonsense term at the high-end intensity of all extreme outdoor pursuits. Put simply, risks such as falling rock and ice, hidden underwater dangers such as foot entrapments, unexpected malfunction of equipment or a hidden tree stump in the snow cannot always be managed. However, personal skill and experience however can be improved and managed as a means to reduce risk.

Considering the above, I would like highlight some experiences that have shaped my perspective on risk. This is the third revision of this article and my perspective continues to develop.

**1. The Competency Cycle (see right) is an excellent measuring stick for one’s inclination to taking and managing risk.**

First introduced to me in an AST 1 course I am often reminded that ego has a large part to play in my delusional capacity to manage risk. Too much stoke and too much speed can end badly (See Figure 2 below) and on two occasions has ended poorly for myself. My “She’ll be right attitude” in such situations has been detrimental. Perhaps I should be more kind to myself. After all, I’ve only just turned 25 and apparently, that’s when you’re decision making in the prefrontal cortex becomes more solid. Hell, maybe that’s why I’m writing this article, dealing with the aftermath. But I digress. In both situations I would consider myself in Stage 4 of the competency cycle having ignored the alarm bells of fatigue in my brain whilst operating for long periods in a high risk environment.





◀ The Competency Cycle. A cycle we are all constantly in and need to consider when managing ourselves in the outdoors.

(1) You are unaware or ignorant of the dangers and therefore make decisions that are unknowingly dangerous. Your minimal toolkit of skills and past experiences means you are incompetent.

(2) After some formative experiences you become aware of just how incompetent you really are. You adjust your mindset to be more realistic of your capability.

(3) With more experience you begin to make informed conscious decisions that allow you to safely and competently manage risk. The best place to be in this cycle. Highly skilled and aware of dangers. Take calculated risks here.

(4) You complete tasks/objectives easily which once were challenging. Processes have become automated or require minimal thinking. This can result in poor management of risk in high stake environments. Dire consequences may result.

**2. Aim to always be in Stage Three of the Competency Cycle. Make informed, conscious decisions and if you step into something out of your circle of competence pause for a second to reconsider before moving on.**

Risky situations in which the environment poses a significant risk can be honestly acknowledged and confronted in a responsible way, though society broadly fails to recognise this and often condemns

those that take such extraordinary risks who then get hurt. A recent trip with Luke Frisken, Guillaume Stanguennec and Liv Johnson up to Mt Bogong was a formative experience in carefully managing risk. The snow forecast was for one of the largest dumps of the year. Saturday's conditions proved cumbersome and we barely ventured more than one kilometre up Eskdale Spur. As the weekend progressed we were frothing to get out there. However; we took our time and more than five snowpits were dug over the weekend

and conservative terrain choices were made with the snowfall that had occurred. At the end of the Sunday it was clear; we skied only 2 runs and given the storm conditions limited our choice of skiing due to concerns with the conditions. Within the group we discussed and moderated our acceptable levels of risk so that all members of the group felt safe. Were we responsible? Well looking back it appears yes, for the most part we made some conservative choices and were all safe. I learnt much from my more conservative counterparts.



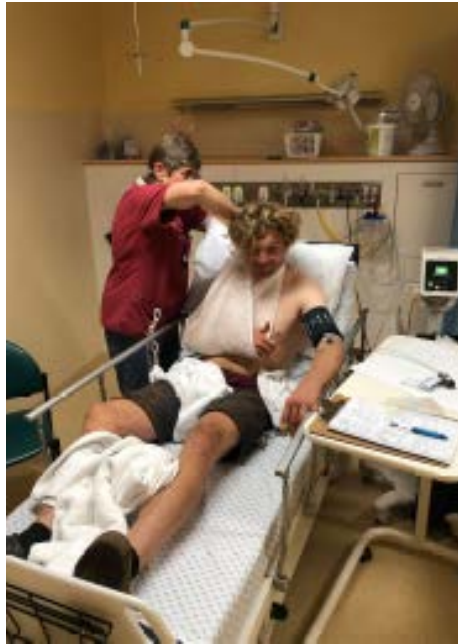
▲ Mentorship can even come in the form of a paid guide service. Mt Cook Alpine Guides on the charge on the Tasman Glacier during a course I paid for and undertook. A formative experience. Photo: Lachlan Short



▲ Luke Frisken (2018/19 snow sports officer) assesses the conditions up at Mt Bogong after a massive August dump in 2018. Photo: Lachlan Short



▲ Incident 1: A spiral fractured Humerus. The 2016/2017 Ski Season whilst I was ski instructing in Japan for two months. First ski instructing season, 36 hours after Australia Day, Skiing (while hungover) by myself at night in storm conditions. I didn't crash, but kept skiing upright as my arm simply snapped after I believe the pole was caught in something. I don't ski with pole straps around my wrists anymore. No surgery, full recovery. Got lucky.



▲ Incident 2: November 2019 a dislocated shoulder whilst riding at Lake Mountain. Same arm. Close to 1000m of vertical descent riding. Tired and fatigued after riding after a friend on the E-bike the day previous I was physically spent prior to commencing the ride. Riding at the limits of my ability, I had already fallen off 1 hour earlier. I was tired and should have rested. Here I am 3 shots of Morphine and two green whistles deep. The remote location three hours later I arrived at the hospital. Six months later my shoulder is still recovering.

**3. If you know your stuff in managing risk and charging in the outdoors it's your responsibility to pay it back to others and become a mentor.**

Many of us have know this but need to be dutifully reminded! University clubs, outdoor education programmes and other programs look to facilitate and provide expert mentors to ensure the safety of individuals and ensure informed choices are made. Many of us have seen individuals who are not often aware on the decisions that they are making and therefore may not even be able to recognise that they are unconsciously incompetence within the competency cycle. We all were once gumbies. So go bloody help someone out and be a mentor.. Perhaps the best advice I was recently provided was by Dave McKinley, the Head Guide of Alpine Guides in Mt Cook Village which was to take big risks occasionally, and only bite off what I could stomach when it felt right.

### Further Reading:

- Teton Gravity's "Chance of Dying Ranked by Sport and Activity" Infographic: <https://www.tetongravity.com/story/news/your-chances-of-dying-ranked-by-sport-and-activity>
- The Role of Intuition in the Decision Process of Ski Guides, Iain Stewart Patterson (IFGMA Guide), 2008. Thompson Rivers University. BC.



▲ Mt Bogong in its finest hour. Was it worth the Risk? Did we make safe choices? I think so. At the very least, we got away with it. Photo: Luke Frisken.



# GUIDING & INSTRUCTION



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**CLOSE  
ENCOUNTERS  
WITH THE  
LOWER  
LEVELS OF  
BULMER  
CAVERN,  
NEW  
ZEALAND**





Keith Chatterton and I first visited Close Encounters in November 2018 after requiring a backup plan for a failed Stormy Pot trip. Deciding it was too wet for Stormy Pot and looking for something to do, Mike Allen from NSG suggested a visit to Close Encounters in Bulmer Cavern instead. According to Mike, there were still a few leads in this section of the cave that needed to be investigated. Close Encounters is a dead-end passage that heads north approximately 300m below Bulmer's Castle Keep entrance. At its northernmost limit a huge rockfall chamber terminates abruptly in a faulted wall with rockfall blocking any obvious way on. Since its discovery in 1986, several attempts to find a way through the terminal choke have been made by cavers keen on long abseils and black voids, but despite discoveries being made, the way through to a northward continuation has remained elusive. Leads however still remain and thanks to Mike's beta, one in particular caught our attention enough to decide to pay Close Encounters another visit.

With a plan quickly hatched, Keith and I decided to make a quick day trip down Castle Keep to look at the most obvious lead – a small climb up a dripping hole in the roof right at the terminal end of Close Encounters. This quick trip actually required a three day round trip. We walked up to the lake camp on Monday, went caving on Tuesday, and walked back down on Wednesday, just in time to avoid the torrential floods in Bulmer Creek and the east branch of the Owen River.

Tuesday morning we left the lake camp early. It would be midnight before we would make it back to camp. Down in Close Encounters we made it half-way up the climb, and could see it opened somewhat on the other side, but we were ultimately defeated in our quest for new passage. We left empty handed and humbled by the scale of the cave. We did however have a plan for the 2019 Bulmer Expedition in a month's time.

## Bulmer 2019

Only a month after our first trip to Close Encounters, Keith and I were heading back at Christmas time to join the Bulmer 2019 expedition. We were joined by Lewis Clarey and Kirra Solterbeck, also from Melbourne. The goal was to go back, finish the climb, and hopefully find the high-level passage heading for Blue Creek. We flew up to a temporary camp in Poverty Basin, joined by Mike Allen, Gary Sands and Gary's son Dean. There were also a number of other tasks we needed to tick off while up at "top camp". These included checking out Owen Ice Cave and prospecting for more holes on the surface. After a short but windy flight up, we arrived in Poverty Basin.

### Day One

On the 5th of January 2019, we were ready to head underground. With packs full of climbing gear, Lewis and I descended the 300m entrance series of Castle Keep. Once we hit the horizontal passage, I enthusiastically hurried Lewis to the climb. We arrived, Lewis looked up and said "is that it?", obviously dissatisfied with the body-sized hole in the roof. I tried to persuade him otherwise: "we only have a few metres to go, it will be easy!". It was nearing lunchtime so we agree to have some food and talk over the plan.

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***... the thing that caught Lewis' attention was a small hole, the size of a fist, with an ever so slight breeze coming out of it.***

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Before I knew it Lewis had escaped and was off searching for new leads. We found some large holes either side of the main passage, just before the large rockfall chamber, but the thing that caught Lewis' attention was a small hole, the size of a fist, with an ever so slight breeze coming out of it. It was situated on the far side of the rockfall chamber, in the sheer flat face that seemed to block the way on. He called me over and asked for a hand to move some small rocks out of the way. In no time we were able to squeeze through and found ourselves in between the wall and the rockpile. Down a few more metres of rockpile, we found two leads and split our efforts. I went left and Lewis went right. The small lead I was looking at had a slight breeze coming out, so I started digging. After 15 minutes I could just slide through, and found myself at the top of a 10m pitch. I made it back through the squeeze and ran in to Lewis. "Shall we head back out and try that climb? My lead doesn't go anywhere." he said. "No



◀ Keith Chatterton descending the 68m Tombstone pitch below Close Encounters, Bulmer Cavern. Photo: Lewis Clarey

▲ Matt unsuccessfully trying Virginia squeeze, Photo: Lewis Clarey



▲ Keith at the head of Tombstone Pitch.  
Photo: Lewis Clarey

way", I reply, "I've got a pitch we need to go down!"

We returned with a couple of ropes and found our way down the pitch, through some down climbs, the cave getting increasingly drippy. Then up a short ramp and down another 10m pitch. At the bottom lay a small hole, much too small for either of us to get through, but howling a gale! I gave it a shot, and even after taking off my SRT kit, did not stand a chance. We turned around and headed out, counting it as a minor success. We had bigger things to explore. Needless to say, we didn't get any climbing done that day.

## Day Two

On the 7th we headed back to Close Encounters, this time joined by Keith. The plan was to check out the large holes on either side of the passage. I let the others head in earlier, around 10am, so I could enjoy the fantastic weather on the surface. When it rolled around to 3pm, I thought it was about time to head in too. I arrived at the bottom to find Keith and Lewis surveying the passage we had discovered two days earlier. I was surprised as this was not the original plan, but also excited as my timing

couldn't have been better; Keith had just made it through the "impassable squeeze", which he called "Virginia Squeeze", I'll let you guess why. Keith informed us that on the other side was a "six-second aven that you could fit two buses down, side by side". Lewis and I had to make sure he wasn't kidding!

We all eventually made it through the squeeze and found ourselves at the top of the now named "Tombstone Pitch". It was about 70m deep and would easily fit two buses side by side. Keith went first and knocked a large flake off the wall on the way down, giving the pitch its name. At the bottom, it didn't take long to find the rest of the way on; another pitch some 40m deep. We had no rope left so it was time to head out. It was well past our bedtimes.

## Day Three

It seemed as if there were not enough hours in the day. There was too much cave to explore, and not enough time to sleep. We were all starting to get tired of the entrance series by this point. In particular, the sequential pitches: 70m, 104m, 60m, 40m were very demanding, with minimal rest in between. Nevertheless, we had a promising lead we had to go back to explore.

With another two bags of rope we departed camp, determined to use it all. The commute in was becoming routine and in no time we were looking over the edge of the next pitch. We knew we were well below the top of the Southpark Aven, however that didn't stop us from making jokes about dropping in on Kieran and Chris, who were continuing a 200m+ climb up the aven. The further down we went, the wetter it got. At the bottom of the next pitch there was no option other than hiding in an alcove, just to avoid the rain. We faced a problem though: where to from here? It was getting late and we had to choose from a lead at the bottom of the pitch, involving a decent vertical squeeze or another lead further back in the chamber above. No one was thinking clearly so I made the executive decision to go down the vertical squeeze. We knew it would be a long way down. Throwing



rocks and listening to them bounce down was almost an excuse to not go exploring. We knew it was a gigantic chamber too, as the echo lasted for around 10 seconds. Armed with a drill, I volunteered to stand under the drips at the newly formed pitch-head. Heading down, the squeeze opened up after 5m or so and even with a full brightness Scurion, I couldn't see the bottom. Down further, I got a little worried. I only had so much rope in my bag. I took it out and let it fall: would it reach the bottom? No. Damn. You know that feeling when you're hanging in the middle of a 90m pitch, halfway down and your rope doesn't reach the bottom? This was one of those.

I yelled out to the others to scavenge some spare rope from the Tombstone Pitch above us, knowing that there might just be enough between that and the tape I had in my bag. I headed down to set a re-belay. Soon enough, the shipment of rope arrived and I found myself floating down toward the ground once again. Tiredness had kicked in 110%. I chuckled slightly when I found myself on the ground with just enough rope to comfortably land on my tiptoes. We named this pitch "Midnight Bus Ride" for one reason: It felt like we were on a bus ride home in the early hours of the morning. I called the others down and went for a wander. I found the obvious way on – another pitch. Damn, we had no rope. We had a little celebration for our achievement. It was a contemplative moment. This was my last day, and I would be leaving the project incomplete with so much promise. However, Keith and Lewis had a few more days to continue exploration. I had to trust they would do well. We headed out again and finally found rest with the sun greeting us over the horizon.

## Day Four

The next few days saw a change to the vertical daily routine we had been keeping. Kirra and I had a flight to catch from Christchurch, so we disappeared off the mountain. The Poverty Basin camp moved down to the lake, mostly due to a bad weather forecast. Everyone also needed a rest, so exploration was put on hold for a few days. Finally Lewis and Keith were

determined to make the connection. By looking at the survey, they were expecting to come in somewhere around Camp 2.5. With more rope they left lake camp, walking up to Castle Keep.

They found themselves once again venturing down the seemingly endless pitches. After reaching the bottom of Midnight Bus Ride they proceeded down a small pitch, through a tiny squeeze behind the waterfall and down another 40m pitch. This dropped them into a big horizontal passage with some old rope. Connection! However, if they couldn't find where they were and how to get back to the main commuter route of Bulmer, they were looking at having to ascend the 590m back out via Castle Keep. Something I'm sure neither of them would fancy.

After wandering up and down the passages with nothing familiar in sight for four hours they eventually resorted to surveying a rough mud map of the area to pinpoint their location. It was the junction of Snaggle Puss and Far and Away streams! From there, they proceeded out to Panorama Ledge and after a 23-hour round trip, they arrived back at the lake camp at roughly 7am, to an enthusiastic ensemble. A group had been awaiting their return and, within 2 hours of their arrival, were setting off on their own through-trip.

Their through-trip went roughly as expected, however upon reaching the bottom of Midnight Bus Ride, Travis Cross looked at the way on and did not think it was the right course. In a

moment of supposed luck, he spotted a lead on the other side of the room which, upon further investigation, had been rigged sometime in the past. Following their nose, this group found an alternate, drier route to Camp 2.5, connecting in at Flogging a Dead Horse, a climb completed the previous year near the camp 2.5 water supply.

## Where to now?

While we didn't find any high-level passage heading to Blue Creek, this trip was hardly a failure. The entire Castle Keep series is absolutely beautiful and it was a pleasure commuting in and out. With the survey we now have an almost direct route to tie the back end of Bulmer to the known Castle Keep entrance coordinates. Our survey indicates the lower levels of Bulmer are out by roughly 100m to the northeast. This will hopefully assist further connections and exploration. Furthermore, it has potential to become a commuter route to Camp 2.5. It does however add quite a walk-in from Bulmer Lake. Only time will tell. As a day through-trip, it is an amazing experience (or so I'm told!). Finally, a huge thanks to those who assisted or joined us on our adventures. We hope to be back soon, finding more virgin passage!

*Editorial note: This article was originally published in the New Zealand Speleological Bulletin, Issue 217, June 2019.*



▲ Lewis in Beautiful Bulmer section.  
Photo: Lewis Clarey

# DIVING INTO TRAD CLIMBING

## NATÁLIE UHLÍKOVÁ

I have recently moved from icy cold Czech Republic to Australia in the middle of its hot summer, to start a PhD program at The University of Melbourne. When I landed at Tullamarine Airport, I had no idea that exactly two weeks later, I would be leaving the city to spend the weekend in the wilderness doing an activity I've never tried before: traditional climbing and abseiling.

With my passion for outdoor activities and having done some indoor top-rope climbing before, I didn't think twice before signing up for the course 'Intro to Trad Climbing and Abseiling' organized by Jack McCutchan and Luke Frisken. I was one of the two complete beginners admitted to the trip, having poor knowledge of Aussie nature, and no gear of my own. I realized there was no time to study an encyclopedia of 'Venomous Plants and Animals and How to Avoid them or Behave Near them' before getting to the camp. Instead, in the few days left before the departure, I settled for a quick trip to the CBD for a head torch and a raincoat, while borrowing the rest of the gear from MUMC and Laura.

Finally, Friday evening arrived and we hit the road. Our four-hour bumpy ride to the Pines Camping Ground ended close to 1 am (note: the 'bumpy' refers to the road condition, not Gavin's driving skills ;). I couldn't see a thing in the dark, except the super shiny stars in the sky, brighter than those I was used to gazing at in Europe. The second thing I noticed was that my head torch, on which I really counted, had failed me. Brilliant, the only piece of equipment that actually belonged to me, was useless. Laura along with Gavin (both having functional head torches) skilfully built a tent in a record speed, and in 15 minutes I was already crashing on Laura's mat, listening to the roaring wind and wondering if I would wake up in the morning with a tent collapsed upon my head.

To my relief, the tent was still standing when I woke up, and I could hear that the sound of the wind had

been replaced by some noisy birds that were enjoying a dawn breakfast. After having breakfast of our own, we left the camp and headed to the Bushrangers Bluff at exactly 8:59:45 according to Jack's watch, which was perfectly in line with his agenda to leave at 9:00:00. The weather was super hot that day. It didn't matter how much layers of 50 SPF sunscreen

I put on, the sun would find a way to get through and burn my skin. The rumours that the Australian sun 'bites' are definitely true.

I was grouped with Laura, Gavin and Miriam under Jack's supervision. In the morning, we were learning how to belay someone, how to take a lead fall, how to set up an ERNEST anchor for abseil, and I got to climb



▲ The Organ Pipes in full daylight; Perfect features carving into spotless sky.



▲ Tranquil dawn at the Pines brightened up by magpie choir.





▲ Dawn at Arapiles, painted by the author

up the mountain for the first time! I remember having a strange feeling: a mixture of excitement and a bit of fear. Unlike with Jack's belaying, I was reluctant to put full trust in small pieces of metal (nuts & cams) at first, but I got used to them soon. Our effort was rewarded with beautiful views from the top. Being used to hilly landscapes, the surroundings of mount Arapiles seemed incredibly flat to me.

I realized throughout this training that the rate of learning new stuff is much faster when your life depends on it. I bet that if I'd had such a threat of injury/death hanging over my chemistry test results, I would have had finished my undergraduates in half of the time and with a perfect score ;)

Saturday night was in the sign of metamorphosis. "Are there any first-timers to Arapiles?" I heard someone asking while we hung around under the starry sky. We'd just eaten our

dinners and were ready to pass out on the mat.

"What isn't my first time?" I laughed to myself. "Me". Turned out that there's an initiation ritual called The Squeeze Test. "You'll be reborn, come and you'll see!" So, I went. I was taken to a piece of rock with a small crack leading from one side to another, cutting through the massif. That night, I was reborn head first, and Jack was re-born coming out with his legs first. To my surprise, the only parts of my body that got stuck in the rock were my ankles.

On Sunday, we did a multi-pitch climb at Preludes Wall and worked on making anchors. I spent most of the day catching up on knot tying and placing nuts, cams, and chicken heads into the rock. Jack was incredibly patient with his beginner subgroup and kept explaining and demonstrating all the essential stuff over and over. We couldn't have wished for a nicer teacher! At the end of the day, I didn't qualify as a seconder, but I felt really

satisfied with the progress I'd made – from nearly zero to... an Arapilesian fresher. It was a very exciting trip full of new information and getting to know people.

I would like to give special thanks to Luke for helping Jack organising the trip, and to Aaron and Anthony for their kind supervision and assessment of seconds. Without their contribution this weekend course would not have been possible.

My brain is still digesting all that exciting stimuli from the weekend. The night after we returned, I was making chicken heads and checking my abseil anchor evenness with Jack in my dreams! And today, I caught myself tying a clove hitch and the figure-8 knot on my hoodie string. To all newcomers, I encourage you to join one of the MUMC trad climbing trips, it will blow your mind!



# PIE AND SLIDE

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## Our 2019 winners

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### **"Skiing is fun"**

**- Guillaume Stanguennec**

"Jack is just always happy while skiing especially with some true Australian powder."



### **"Christina's First Canyoning trip"**

**- Sam Thompson**

"A rainy day trip to the Otway Ranges"



### **"Defeated in a crater"**

**- Aline Boer**

"Conservation volunteers at the centre of a crater, stuck in the cold and rain whilst trying to rake out "graffiti" made by tourists"



### **"The Low-down on Taranaki, NZ" – Emilie Duncan**



**"Standing in the light"**  
– Emilie Duncan

"Gokyo Lakes, Nepal."



**"Midnight Ascent Snow Pool"**  
– Luke Frisken

"Midnight Ascent Sunset at the snow pool "



**"Breakfast at Richards"**  
– Sarah McConville

"Richard loves good food, and on trips doesn't stint on cooking up something if we can.. this may be slightly exaggerated."



**"The (rusty and only) Way Forward"**  
– Sarah McConville

"Many via ferrata routes pepper the Swiss Alps and Dolomites, paths painstakingly made by pitons hammered into cliffs. Some jiggle, some are rusty, however you must trust them put your weight on them and keep going. "

**"Mysterious Feathertop"**  
– Guillaume Stanguennec

"Taken from little feathertop after the biggest dump and storm of the snow season. "



# THANK YOU VERY MUCH TO OUR PIE AND SLIDE SPONSORS!





# Hut Maintenance 2018-2019

JACK MCCUTCHAN

The MUMC Memorial Hut is a symbol of permanence. As we celebrate 75 years of our club's history, we might look back to see how much has changed, but the hut stands as evidence of how much they have stayed the same.

No matter how many layers of technology your Goretex jacket has, the Tom Kneen track up the NW spur isn't going to get any easier. A rusted container by the sink holds old editions of *The Mountaineer*, where past members share recipes based on dehydrated mash and their terror from the same first lead climbs that we're still doing at Arapiles. Dale Thistlethwaite's heartfelt ode to a member lost to the mountains is echoed in the mourning expressed in the years after the club lost her and Stu. As another cup of tea is brewed, the summit of Feathertop elusively reveals itself between the cloud for just a brief moment.

Every trip to the hut connects us to our larger self, representing a collective spirit of aspiration that seems to have remained constant throughout the generations. Just as the hut was passed on to us, the work we put into the building and its surrounds is an effort to share that same experience. Just as we did, OXOs will continue crashing through the overgrowth, soaked to the skin with toes frozen, suddenly finding themselves standing at the front steps of the most unlikely building they've ever seen.

Beyond the usual upkeep, the hut is due for some love and attention. I've been trying to coordinate this since early 2018, pulling together all the people who have the skills and enthusiasm required, a lot of old and new faces, mashing some ideas to try and get a vision together. The biggest challenge is always going to be breaking up the puzzle into enough achievable chunks that we aren't overwhelmed.

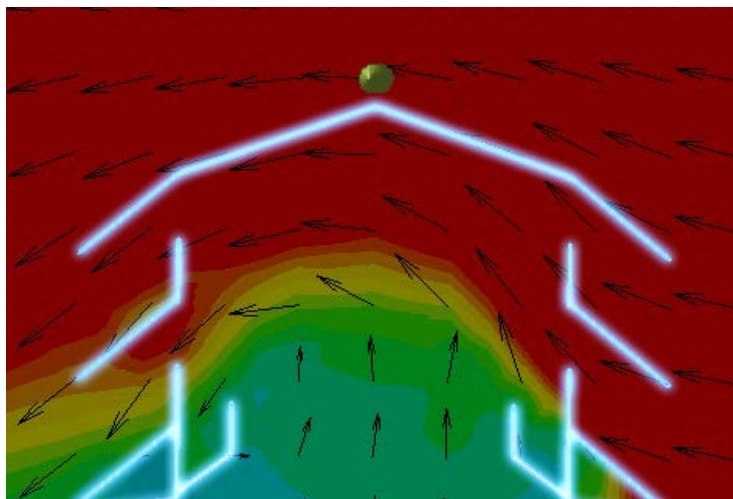
Our main challenge is to create a building that can passively handle the abuse of such an extreme environment.

Improving comfort and preventing the current mould damage will require sealing the exterior shell, improving internal air circulation, then insulating the walls and windows to prevent condensation. Eventually we may want to re-install a dry heat source, such as a small pot-belly coal stove for winter use.

Here's a rough order of the work that needs doing in the coming years:

- Install solar panel and lighting (done!)
- Progressively seal the roof leaks
- Improve cellar storage for tools and materials
- Replace top air vent to generate more airflow
- Replace downstairs windows to be open again
- Progressively insulate the interior of the hut
- Replace mould-damaged wood
- Install a small heat source for winter
- Replace interior furniture and cabinetry

There's a lot to do and it'll take a long time, but with a club this capable, I think we'll get there. We should be trying to maintain the integrity of the experience that the hut creates, but not be afraid to make improvements. As well as everyone who's come along to the maintenance trips, I want to thank everyone who's come up and enjoyed the hut, we've had some pretty incredible and surreal times up there. Here's to more snow gum sunsets, drips on the sleeping bag, tears on the track, shit-fuck icy snow, leaches, shooting stars, basement spiders, three-course meals, sore knees and deckchairs. The MUMC hut is the full package, as it always has been.



▲ Using airflow simulations to iteratively design a new vent for the hut to maximise passive airflow and keep out the bad weather.



▲ Jack and Max show that steak and bad hairstyles never go out of fashion.

Photo: Will Manahan





# KENT GROUP

Recipients of the MUMC Adventure Grant, Jack McCutchan and Richard Bassett-Smith, find themselves alone in the Bass Strait, searching for the promised lands of granite sea cliffs guarded by a formidable stretch of ocean.

▲ Following Richard's lead up a new route on the western side of Erith Island.



# Rock climbing in the Bass Strait by sea kayak

JACK MCCUTCHAN

Photos: Jack McCutchan and Richard Bassett-Smith

***I pulled my camera out my front pocket to take a quick selfie, as Richard dribbled his breakfast down his chin behind me, not even able to lean out to the side. He managed a weak smile and I could see the pain in his eyes. Moments like this are precious, so I made sure to take a few seconds of video as well. We were three hours off the coast of Deal Island, in the Bass Strait, with more than 50km left to go to Flinders Island. The waves rolled through around us and I looked out to the faint pair of shadows on the horizon; our two kayaks felt very small in such a vast space. Our minds painted a picture much bigger than our eyes, seeing empty ocean far beyond the horizons. Every minute we waited, tidal currents pushed us further off course, so we needed to keep going.***

For the first time, I wound my way around the dark corners of the clubrooms MUMC in early 2015, following muted voices coming from the library. For me, the Kent Group was first a giant sketch on the front window. A hand-drawn map of three islands in the Bass Strait, promising cliffs, simple living and the unknown. In the southwest corner, “Anja’s strippers” were also marked on the map, with a large collection jar half-full of change fundraising for their services. Plans and lists were made, followed by budgets and deposits

and before we knew it, the whole thing didn’t sound that fun anymore. We never made it that year, but the images—more imagined than actual photos—stuck with us.

The idea of climbing there resurfaced when Richard and I were on the Marañón in 2017 (*The Mountaineer*, April 2018, p42), feeling strained as part of such a large group. We weren’t sure how we’d do it—the first plan to get to the Kent Group was simply to hitch-hike. We’d sweet-talk some sailors down at the docks who would be more than happy to take us along, though I didn’t plan on telling them about my severe seasickness.

This was our best option all the way until a month before our intended departure date. Richard had been leading sea kayak trips in NZ during the year and had realised that paddling there wasn’t actually out of our reach. Along with his sea-kayaking know-how, both of us felt like our experience in whitewater paddling, alpine climbing and general suffering should add up to some form of competence.

What’s more, if we were going to paddle halfway to Tassie, we figured we may as well finish the job and get all the way there. What were once our own naughty thoughts of wanting to kayak to the Kent Group were out in the open now, the game had changed.

*I was glad to be wearing long pants today. My left knee was wedged fast behind a large flake of rock and I thought back to one of my favourite climbing videos on the internet, “Boogie ‘til You Poop”, wondering if Richard would notice if I too shat myself out of fear. I twisted my feet around inside the crack, but the fresh surface of the granite—yet to be worn out by other climbers—rubbed away beneath me, drizzling crystals down onto Richard. I sunk back onto my stuck knee. At the top of the pitch, I looked down at the fresh blood left behind below, sharp grit still embedded in my ankle. Before I knew it, Richard was next to me, having moved hand-over-hand up the huge flake without a single jam, just like how Anna climbs.*

*“Three stars! What an awesome pitch, such nice moves!”*



▲ After throwing up his breakfast, Richard tries to forget that there are nine more hours of paddling ahead of us. We left the Kent Group (background) earlier that morning.

# LAND SWEET SWEET LAND



▲ Arriving at Hogan Island, after our first open water crossing from Wilson's Prom. A 30-minute sprint against strong cross-currents was necessary to reach the island, as we had miscalculated our route and arrived during a changing tide.

I mumbled my agreement, wide-eyed and shell-shocked, looking up at the big chimney-sized crack still above us.

We named this climb, our first route of the trip, "Tight Fit for a Queen".

You don't need to be a sailor to conjure up a vivid image of the Bass Strait. Certainly not if you're a mother hearing that her son was about to cross it in a kayak. Anna had found a news article about a kayaker being stalked around Wilson's Prom by a Great White. Yet there we were, driving out to buy our sea kayaks from a strange man on Gumtree, wondering if all the stories were true. Laminated marine charts soon arrived in a tube at my door, showing the speed and direction of currents at each change of the tide, some of them almost as fast as we might hope to paddle.

At this stage, we were surprised to land our first funding for trip from my boss Bill Hopper, whose enthusiasm for engineering is trumped only by an enthusiasm for kayaking.

The support came at just the right time for us, as though we needed someone to unconditionally believe in our adventure before we would take ourselves seriously. Support from the MUMC Adventure Grant was soon to follow once we'd convinced the committee to also take a chance on us.

*I saw movement in the water between us, ghostly shapes flickering beneath the surface. We'd read stories of a shipwrecked crew being attacked by Great Whites as they attempted to cross the Murray Pass in a raft made of stretched seal skins but after a week on the islands, we now knew better than to be afraid. I reached into my cockpit and pulled out my snorkel mask. As a dozen glistening dolphins slipped silently back down into the water underneath my kayak, I put on the mask and rolled the boat over to watch them tumbling in all directions beneath me. I locked eyes with the closest one and we both calmly regarded each other as we passed, the tourist and the resident equally curious about the arrival of the other. Reluctantly, I swept my paddle*

*through the water and returned to my own world.*

"You just don't go out in conditions like that." Concern began pouring in from all directions. "No, there are islands to stop at each night." We issued those mantras ad nauseum and learned as much as we could in our limited timeframe. We'd need at least three good days of weather to get away from Wilson's Prom, which seemed unlikely in December. As weeks went on and the wind kept blowing, messages between Richard and I became less frequent as we questioned whether it was worth sinking any more money into the project with such little chance of success.

20 Dec 2018 8.52am - Richard: "Looks like we are on."

Graham, a friend of Richard's and an oceanographer, had run a simulation of the tide and weather data for us and found a window that we hadn't. This news left us with a day to kick into gear—make all those final packing decisions, stock up with a month of



food and race around town ticking off the equipment list.

"Is this all for you?" asked the check-out attendant, after scanning half a basket of salami.

Food and gear were piled up on the floorboards all around me. Anna was falling asleep as she weighed out couscous on the bed. We still had a pile of tide and weather forecasts to make sense of in order to plot our routes for the crossing days. I called Richard at midnight and we decided to give ourselves another day to prepare, but after months of talking about it, we might actually be doing this.

*The wind turned to strike us from the front and whitecaps broke across the front deck of my boat. Each stroke felt like stirring setting concrete, my back and core muscles threatening to detach from the bones in protest. I struggled to keep my eyes open; they were bobbing around inside my head like corks, unable to focus. If this is only day one, I can't paddle to Tasmania, I told myself. I focused on remembering all the details of my suffering, as past experience told me I'd forget as soon as it ended. As we came around the last outcrop of rocks to enter Refuge Cove, dolphins appeared nearby, swimming along next to us. They laughed cruelly at me, so tired and pathetic. A gentle swell reflected back off the rock shelf next to me and caught my stomach by surprise, leaving me hurling over the side of my cockpit as Richard paddled away unawares. I looked up, my eyes locked onto Refuge Cove in front of me, painted in the watercolour hues of*

*sunset. My head was clear after hours in a dark fog, the psychological symptoms of seasickness now embarrassingly obvious.*

After the tortures of our first day, day two, from Refuge Cove to Hogan Island, was a longer day but certainly felt easier. Stiff fingers struggled to wrap around the paddle shaft, but our minds were duly refreshed after a good sleep on the beach. Military rule took over and we implemented mandatory breaks every half hour, now understanding the advice given by a friend who'd crossed last year. No more than two minutes, just enough time to check our navigation or visit the bathroom (a Gatorade bottle). We had to eat something at each stop, whether we wanted to or not. By breaking apart the effort, we could maintain motivation as the hours wore on.

The shapes of the Hogan Group emerged on the horizon after a couple of hours and the cliffs of the Prom ebbed away in the background. The water remained warm, but took on a deep, bottomless blue as we left the coast. Out in the open water, we were investigated by large gulls making slow passes in front of us, before continuing their patrol. The seas were calm and flat, the gentle swell slightly aiding our progress. We arrived at the Hogan Group ahead of schedule, so caught the tide in full swing. We sprinted, pointing almost perpendicular to our goal, struggling to hold our position as we edged our way towards a gap in the islands that led to our camp. Exhausted, we arrived in the early

afternoon and on the horizon, the cliffs of the Kent Group were now visible, a sight we'd been dreaming of for such a long time now. A curious pair of native rats kept us company throughout the night, investigating our sleeping bags and faces with a tenacity that would be commendable in different circumstances.

*I looked out at the blank rock ahead. A couple of small cams behind me would be enough to keep me off the deck, but it'd be a big fall. This brief moment carried with it the weight of years of dreams, months of preparation and weeks of effort, so there was no option but commitment. From my comfortable stance, I leant out to weight a fraction of a toe, fingernails scratching for any edge but finding nothing. Further, further, until I couldn't go back. At full stretch, my fingertips reached out to a tight finger-lock crack, enough to take my full body weight and place some gear at last. The pitch continued up a beautiful knuckle-sized corner crack, until just metres from the top where all features once again disappeared. With forearms burning, it was time for quick decisions and I decided to go for it. My feet fought for friction on the glassy rock and I lunged up to the top hold but it wasn't enough, I was falling. I saw the waves crashing against the rocks below us, my last piece of protection flying by, bright orange granite continuing to rush past. As the rope came tight and I slowed to a stop, I let out a whoop and felt alive in such a wild place.*

As we paddled under the cliffs that mark the entrance to the Murray Passage, a deep cut of water down the



▲ Another day, another nap. Reaching Emita after a short, but difficult leg of the trip.



▲ Scouting out our first lines of the trip at Big Red Cliffs, Erith Island.

centre of the Kent Group, Richard's portable speaker blasted disco hits. Our bodies ached worse than ever, but our minds were hardened. We dragged ourselves onto a picturesque beach, tucked away on the East side of Erith Island. I assume that Richard was dancing around on the beach like a drunken sailor, but I was fast asleep in the cockpit of my kayak, water lapping at my heels. In the days that followed, we didn't move much. Richard was stuck in camp with an injured foot, so our time was spent organising our equipment, inventing card games and scheming camp furniture.

Fires and cattle grazing on Erith Island has left long grass, while Dover Island remains protected by an impenetrable woody scrub. Connecting the two islands is a short spit that can be crossed easily at low tide, or without pants at high tide. We found that the only realistic way to make progress towards the cliffs on Dover was to scramble around the granite shoreline. Richard's called his favourite section of this traverse "The Gauntlet", where we had to perch ourselves on a small rock watching the sets of waves coming through, before leaping across and running away from the edge before the next wave hit.

From our base camp on Erith, we progressively circumnavigated the three main islands as well as the rocky outcrop of the North East Isles, taking note of any potential climbs. We came armed with climbing notes from a group who had come decades ago and put up a large collection of first ascents, but most of the cliffs still seemed to have no recorded climbing history. As a team of two, we had to leave most of the best walls we found untouched for a future trip. Over our two weeks in the Kent Group, Richard and I were able to establish four new lines at an unclimbed crag on the east side of Dover Island and two new lines between existing routes on Erith Island. All climbing was well protected with trad gear and no fixed protection is installed on the islands.

As we sat in front of the shack in West Cove, a mast appeared on the horizon. We gathered our sleeping bags from our bush camp and jumped in the kayaks to paddle ten minutes across the Murray to meet our friends, who were already anchored in East Cove on Deal Island. Doug, the captain, loves adventure and had a catamaran in Hobart that needed a crew. Liv loves adventure, had a crew and needed a boat. Somehow Liv had pulled it all

together and on the cat were Doug, Liv, Dave, Taner, Nicole and Sarah. Richard and I climbed aboard for a few days of the good life before they had to head back down to Hobart. We had a couple of days together of climbing, hiking and free diving. Liv and Dave came back on the first afternoon with two giant lobsters, enough to feed the whole crew, washed down with champagne of course. Our group put up another five climbing routes on Deal Island, some of which have likely been climbed before.

*Against a clear, starry sky, lightning flashed on the horizon. Heavy, towering storm clouds pressed their way forward towards our little island. At first silently, then accompanied by rolling thunder, they marched across the open ocean, rising above us. We sat in the dark for hours as the stars were slowly replaced by the hulking mass of the storm. When it rained, we retreated to the tent, but were unable to sleep with the deafening bass drum perched right above our heads. From inside the cloud, we heard lightning strike the island, surely only a few hundred metres away. The storm never raged, instead displaying its strength with patience and control, before it continued on its way out to sea.*



▲ The incredible flake on the first pitch of *Tight Fit for a Queen*.



When the time came to keep heading south, of course it felt too soon, so much potential left unexplored. Paddling from the Kent Group to Flinders Island is the longest leg of the crossing, 58km in a straight line from Winter Cove to Killiecrankie Bay. This day represented the crux of the trip for us, where there was the greatest potential for things to go wrong on such a committing crossing. We received detailed tide data from Graham to plan our route, hoping to use the opposing tides throughout the 12-hour push to maximise our speed by travelling in a large S-bend, rather than fighting against the current.

Richard and I each carried an inReach satellite communicator which relayed our position to my dad who we had given a detailed emergency plan for each crossing day. We also each kept a PLB in our PFDs and had a set of flares mounted to the front deck of the boats. Despite all this, self-sufficiency was key and we'd taken time on our training trips to practice rolling, deep-water re-entries and towing an injured or sick partner.

In the dark that morning, as we were inhaling breakfast, Richard mistook his pink antihistamine tablet for a pink seasickness tablet. When he relived that breakfast down his front at 9am the tidal currents were now at their peak intensity, so slowing down wasn't an option. We hooked up the tow-line between us and I took over navigation. As miserable as he was, Richard was able to keep on paddling behind until the new tablet had kicked in, only occasionally needing a tug if he slipped too far behind. A 1.5m swell crossed our path and broke small whitecaps across the deck most of the day, making bathroom breaks a challenge. The skin on our fingertips, abraded and torn by weeks of climbing granite, was now painfully delicate as it swelled in the sea-water. Cuts and grazes had remained unhealed for the duration of the trip because of the constant salt-water exposure. We rounded our way into Killiecrankie Bay as the afternoon sun began to soften, finally sheltered from the currents after 12 hours on the water. The physical effort was immediately replaced by relief, though again I



▲ Paddling back to camp across the Murray Passage after a day on Deal Island.



▲ Scrambling around the eastern edge of Dover proved easier than crossing through the dense vegetation on top.



▲ Approaching the Swashway, between Erith and Dover Islands.





▲ Sea cliffs of Dover Island, viewed from Erith. Rock quality on this cliff felt similar to the coarse-grained granite of Cape Woolamai, with more loose rock than at other cliffs on the islands.

didn't get to celebrate much onshore, I was already passed out on a rock.

We slept in the next morning, then continued down the coast of Flinders island after midday without thinking too hard about the forecast. A strong offshore wind picked up and threatened to send us off the coast, forcing us to battle across the breaking wave crests back to the beach in Emita. Another short day brought us to the long-awaited Whitemark pub, after almost a month of dehydrated rations (supplemented by lobster and champagne). From here, we'd have just one more stop on Cape Barren Island before the final push across the Franklin sound to land at Little Musselroe Bay on the Tasmanian mainland.

*The kayaks slid off the sand and into the water for the last time, sunrise still two hours away and not a breath of wind in the air. Head torches flickered around as the*

*last checks were made, tags tucked away and compass bearing set. With my torch now turned off, I put in my first stroke and watched my paddle light up in the water beneath me. Another stroke, sparkling with electric-blue phosphorescent plankton as I disturbed the water. As I built speed through the water, slipping silently through the early morning, two bright trails of light broke in a perfect V from my bow, shining brighter the faster we went.*

The wind turbines of Cape Portland were the first sign of land, breaking through the morning fog. We had a moment of sunshine to take photos when we were just off the coast, before the turbines all at once changed direction and picked up speed—it was time to get going. Since we hadn't organised a welcoming committee, we landed at Little Musselroe Bay planning to hike 30km on the gravel road to the nearest highway then hitch-hike to

town. As it happened, a couple had just driven out to see the turbines and were getting back into their car as we washed up. Richard sweet-talked them while I tore off all my wet gear, again robbed of the opportunity to celebrate a milestone. A day later we'd shuttled the whole mess to the ferry terminal in Devonport, only to be told that they wouldn't fit our kayaks that night. We chose an overnight bivy inside a bush, then humped all our gear back down to the terminal the next morning.

Richard and I slumped onto the couches of the Spirit of Tasmania, exhausted but giddy like thieves. I'm not sure we ever felt that we were the right people to be doing a trip like this, hardly willing to admit what we were scheming to friends and family who asked. Even on that first morning, when we were kneeling in the sand at Port Welshpool, burying gear deep in the bellies of our kayaks, we'd been





▲ Big Red Cliffs at sunset. This area had a number of existing routes as well as the two new routes that we climbed. The highly weathered rock was strong and clean, and the corners, aretes, splitter cracks and thin flakes offer potential on almost every aspect.

reluctant to tell a curious passer-by where we were aiming for. I'd never thought I was a person who would climb a mountain, or kayak down a waterfall, or cross this body of water that had scared me even from the ferry; I just thought they were things that other people did with their lives. We certainly hadn't come into this with a lot of preparation, but through some combination of enthusiasm and willingness to take on the unknown, we'd come up capable. We were littler fish than we'd realised, in a bigger ocean than we could imagine, two thieves making off with more than we'd bargained for. While we could never see the other side, we backed ourselves to just keep paddling in the belief we'd end up somewhere worthwhile.

Day 1: Port Welshpool to

Refuge Cove – 40km, 7.5hrs

Day 2: Refuge Cove to Hogan

Island – 48km, 9.5hrs

Day 3: Hogan Island to West Cove

(Erith Island) – 40km, 7.5hrs

Day 4: Winter Cove (Deal Island) to Killecrankie

Bay (Flinders Island) – 58km, 12 hrs

Day 5: Killecrankie Bay to Emita – 28km

Day 6: Emita to Whitemark – 20km

Day 6: Whitemark to Thunder and Lightning

Bay (Cape Barren Island) – 38km

Day 7: Thunder and Lightning Bay to Port

Musselroe (Tasmanian mainland) – 38km



# MITTA MEDICINE

DÁIRE KELLY

**Y**ou would think that having lived on the banks of one of the finest whitewater rivers in the country for a year, I'd be a much better paddler by now, that every free moment I had was spent running laps of Pinball, or the Gorge of the Mitta Mitta. Instead, I kayaked the gorge only once during my year at Mittagundi, but it was probably one of the most cathartic trips I've paddled.

No one else on the staff team for the first eight months of my tenure were paddlers. We'd all done the Swiftwater Rescue course in January, and we would take it in turns to lead the river sledding activity on each of the autumn 10 day programs, but that was where my colleagues' interest in whitewater ended. There were a couple of times when we were driving

back to the farm after dropping the kids off at the train station in Albury, and it had been raining pretty heavily all weekend, that as we turned around the corner from the Bogong High Plains Road onto the Omeo Highway, that the water level in the Mitta Mitta had risen to a level that was perfect for kayaking. I would excitedly call over the radio "Guys, guys! Let's go paddling in the morning!", only to be met with a lukewarm response.

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***"It's too cold."***

***"I'm too tired after that course."***

***"Just take a break for a couple of days."***

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And so my kayak sat and gathered dust for six months. My hopes for getting out on the river were so low, that when I returned to Melbourne for a break before winter, I brought all my paddling gear with me for storage at my parents' house. I knew that winter would be hectic, my opportunities to paddle very limited, but come spring I could paddle the snowmelt.

Then I got a call from Chloe and some friends.

She'd volunteered in April, and said at the end of that course that we should go paddling together sometime. I hadn't expected to hear from her until September at the earliest, because no one paddles in Glen Valley in winter, even Jeffe leaves for warmer climes; the Grand Canyon. But lo and behold, here she was in the middle of July

▼ Tight turns paddling down Graveyard. Photo: Siyuan Hong







▲ Happy paddlers after a long day on the river. Photo: Siyuan Hong

with a small crew of paddlers and an invitation to run the gorge, and me with no paddling gear at all.

Thus began a mad scramble to find something to get me down the river. One of the other girls in the crew, Sia, didn't quite feel confident enough to kayak the gorge, but was happy to try it out in a sports raft, so she graciously loaned me her boat, paddle and spray deck. Score! My home was an outdoor education centre, so the next few items were easy enough to acquire. PFDs, whitewater helmets, wetsuits, thermals, and cags were in plentiful supply.

Our crew was rounded out by Siyuan, Jason, and Mardi, all decent paddlers, all well kitted out for alpine winter paddling. Then there was me; borrowed gear, basic level kit, looking like I'd never been on whitewater before...

The river level that day was a comfortable 1.1m, and we were a crew of 6 experienced paddlers (whether we all looked like it or not) who had all paddled that stretch before. Getting on the river was pure, unadulterated joy. I hadn't realised just how much I needed to be out on the river again. As much as I loved working with the students, taking them out into the wild spaces, it didn't leave me with an abundance of free time to pursue some personal adventures. The section we took the students down with work was pretty tame, and the Gorge was exactly the kind of step up I needed.

Even at the best of times, the Mitta Mitta isn't a large volume river, and only one of the rapids on that stretch is really long enough to warrant getting out of your boat to scout. With that one exception of Graveyard rapid, where we setup throwbag rescue, the whole trip was a quick scout from your

seat and go for it. Even the throwbags at Graveyard weren't necessary for that run, as no one swam, somewhat of a rarity I found out later!

Despite the unfamiliar boat, I felt at ease the entire trip. I sent Bump & Grind, Big Eddy, Waterfall and Gobbler without a hitch, a major confidence boost when I hadn't been in a kayak for close on eight months. I can clearly remember lining up the nose of the boat before dropping into Waterfall, and the sense of tranquillity that settled over me once I was through. The cold didn't phase me anymore. With darkness quickly approaching, we paddled out the last 2km of flatwater, and I didn't want it to end. While I half floated, half paddled down to Hinnomunjie Bridge, I couldn't wipe the massive grin off my face.





# Victorian Backcountry Festival

**LUKE FRISKEN**

**Photos: Guillaume Stanguennec**

In September last year, the inaugural Victorian Backcountry Festival was held. There was a fantastic turnout, perhaps around 200 people. Along with being a great opportunity to meet fellow backcountry snow enthusiasts, there were many educational clinics and group tours run over the course of the weekend.

Well done Cam Walker for organising this event and inspiring so many people to get involved. When I found out about the festival, I decided to volunteer to run a backcountry navigation clinic on Saturday morning. Guillaume Stanguennec (also from MUMC) kindly offered to help out. We had 10 people in total, all very keen

to learn essential skills for effective navigation in off-track snow/white-out conditions.

Some of the topics we covered in the 2 hours of theory and 1.5 hours of practical outside:

- Reading and understanding topographic maps
- Identifying terrain features on a map
- Methods for visualising terrain and slope angle
- Compass navigation
- How to plan a route, being conservative about avalanche danger
- Slope angle measurement methods
- Conservative (Aiming off) navigation using a compass and GPS, the concept of catching features and terrain features you can follow.
- How to use a compass to take bearings
- Smart-phone applications for navigation purposes
- Navigation without a compass, orienting using the sun and snow/wind features (not really covered, I forgot to do this one!)
- Applications of an Altimeter for navigation



Top: Running the Navigation Clinic

▲ Practicing some jump turns..



I spent a fair bit of time researching questions and methods I could use to try and help keep everyone engaged, and understand where they were coming from and what they wanted to learn. Unlike some other teaching I have done in the past, this time it felt like it was getting close to the right amount of content, and we were able to cover everything fairly comfortably in the time that was available. Plenty of questions were asked, and by the end it seemed like most people had grasped the basic idea of compass navigation. However I still feel like a longer practical component, perhaps a day tour with people planning their own navigation and bearings would also be a valuable option for a future clinic. Maybe next year...

On Saturday afternoon after the clinic, I went out for a tour with Peter (from BSAR) and Guillaume. The snow was shockingly similar to sloppy wet concrete, but we still had fun.

On Saturday night, there was a series of talks, followed by some films, presented in a room at the resort. I found both the safety talk by someone from the MSC, and the talk from Katya Krema (of Olympic fame) about her experience getting transitioning into the backcountry especially interesting.

That night after the talks and films, Guillaume and I headed out under the stars towards Roper's Lookout to find a campsite. It has been a long time since I skied with just the starlight, it is truly a wonderful experience.



▲ Views out towards Spion Kopje

In the morning, we packed up the tent just in time to meet Peter again for a day of touring with perfect weather, and a snowpack that had firmed up overnight. Up at the top of the hill, there were some fantastic views of Spion Kopje, and Mt Nelse. We did one run over that side, which turned out to be surprisingly long between the trees. The morning was turning into afternoon, and we decided to head back home, taking a direct route with

an interesting steep looking terrain feature at the top. It was at this point that our party (no names!) managed to drop one ski, followed by another ski 20 minutes later! Luckily they were stopped by a ditch and didn't hit anybody or disappear into the valley.

The event is on again this year at Mt Hotham, from the 4th to the 6th of September 2020. More information can be found on the festival website: <https://backcountry-festival.com/>

The final run down the creek can only be described as exceedingly enjoyable. The gaps between the snow gums were wide enough to really crank on the speed around the corners. At the bottom, the snow bridge over the creek had evidently collapsed, but there was still enough for us to make it over without skis. We threw our skis across and struggled to step over the creek between the bushes. Getting ready to ascend the other side, putting skins on our skis, it became evident that a pair of skins had gone missing, which had been stashed in the front of a jacket for the descent. My stomach sank at the thought of us climbing back up to look for it and getting back to Melbourne late, but luckily it was found next to the creek, and we were all very happy about that!



▲ Skiing on Saturday afternoon

# LOST IN TRANSLATION

TANER KUCUKYURUK

Tucked away in *Schlern/Sciliar*, was our next big plan. Being in the predominantly German speaking part of Italy, South Tyrol, we had a lovely mix of languages. Most of the first ascents in this region were put up by German and Austrian climbers, and as a result, any documentation and topos were mostly in German. Maud's Dutch got us by just enough.

With one rope between us, we decided it wouldn't hold us back. Little did we know that would be the first of a string of red flags. Such is the way so many mishaps in the outdoors begin!

Opting out of an alpine start, we had a relatively leisurely start to the day with the first bus leaving town around 7, arriving an hour later at the *Alps di Siusi*, followed by a few hours' approach to the "hut". Nothing like our Australian huts that might have a few hard bunks, the *Schlernbodenhütte* is more akin to a castle, with a caretaker, a restaurant, and comfortable beds. The more sensible climber might stay in this hut, and get up super early the next day to tackle one of the climbs in this area.

It was this caretaker, who with some mangled hybrid Dutch and German communication, was able to convey to us two things that would make us reconsider our plans. The rock is still wet from previous rains, and that we are

starting too late. As our notes suggested 3 to 6 hours for the ascent, we didn't take heed of the latter warning.

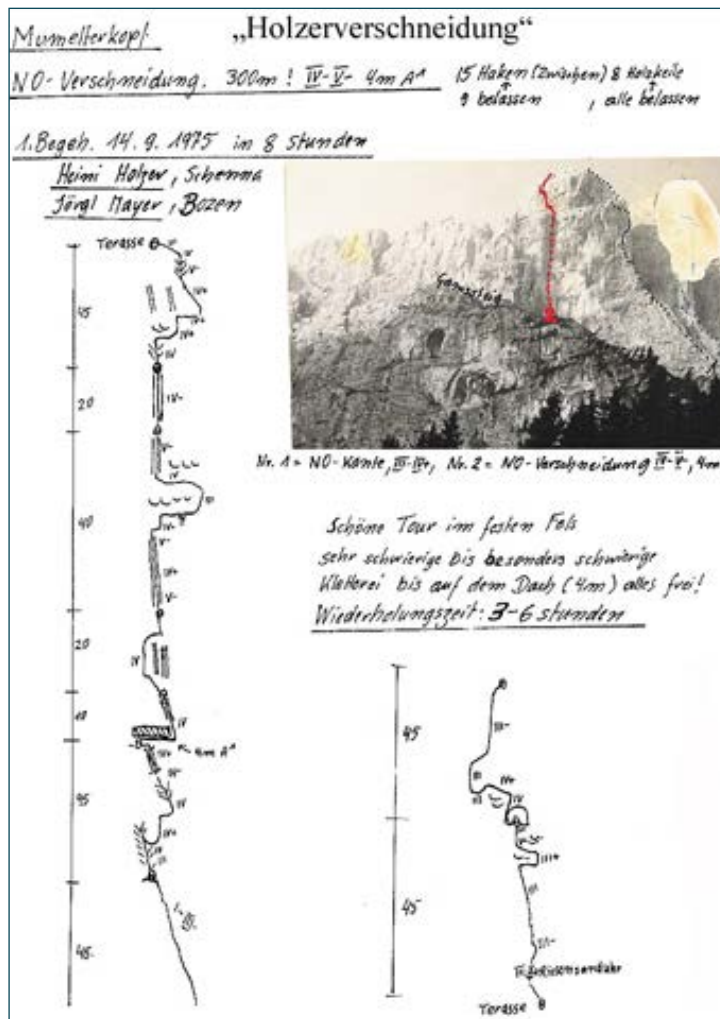
Over a quickbreak, we mulled the matter over and decided to go for it, continuing with the second half of the approach. Navigating a maze of paths referred to as *Gamssteig*, only later discovering its meaning being chamois trails, we discerned the base of our climb. We looked in awe at the searing features of the climb; the *Verschneidung* in the route's name referring to an imposing dihedral.

Comparatively, everything up to this point was smooth sailing. From here on out, we would be inundated with wave after wave of blowbacks. The initial pitch was a minefield of wet slab and choss. One might solo this in different conditions, our attempt took an hour. If we're keeping count of red flags, this would be the fourth.

Continually assuming that matters will improve once we progress through, we pressed on, until the end of the third pitch, where we decided to entertain the idea of retreat. We were not making good time, being uncomfortable with the sparse protection and unfamiliar with the loose and crumbly nature of the rock. Having only one rope made the idea of retreat a daunting prospect, we were beginning to doubt whether we might even find suitable anchor protection every pitch of the descent.







▲ We chose our route, Holzerverschneidung, named after one of the first ascensionists, Heini Holzer and Jörgl Mayer, who went up this route in 1975, flying up in 8 hours. Credit: manuelstuflessner.net

“Are you sure about continuing?” With varying degrees of hesitation, “Yes” was the answer we always settled on...

The constant conversation we were having between us and undoubtedly many more times in our heads. These decisions intensified with each setback, the last being a 30m pitch that was abseiled back down because of the lack of a suitable anchor, with another way up having to be chosen.

“What’s the time?” ...

“Almost 3”

Less than halfway in, we started coming to the realisation that we are not going to finish this climb in daylight, the equinox having just passed meant the days were not short, but not long either. Consistent with our pattern, we decided to continue nonetheless. With a head torch out, and having gone off route once again, it was on my turn to lead that I came across a section that seemed rather bold for the grade, and didn’t fit with the topo.

A bulging section of rock, with sparse handholds, led to some exciting moves resulting in a sizable fall into free space. Surrounded by darkness, this was a uniquely intimidating feeling, and one I thought I wouldn’t let

repeat. Until a short moment later, of course, falling on the same section again, this time my handhold literally vanished, the soft rock having crumbled, and the sling that was threaded through here also freeing itself.

“We don’t want to get injured on a fall up here”

“True”

“There’s a cave we could possibly squeeze into”

“Guess we could hunker down for the night”

It didn’t take us long to decide that this third option, as opposed to boosting onwards or retreating, was the most sound one. Easy said, the slope of the cave and the size of the sleeping platform, if one can call it that, left us in want of means. Despite being only a few weeks out of summer, our altitude of over 2,000m left us in near-freezing temperatures without overnight gear.

Trying to see the funny side of it, we got out the phone to make a little video. Maud began documenting.

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***“We got benighted at 2,200m in Italy up this crumbly as gnarly peak in the Dolomites. Here we are, kiwi style!”***

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“Here’s hoping we get some sleep tonight”. We may have mustered an hour of sleep if that.

The next day was thankfully less eventful. The rock, now bathed in the morning sunlight, gave us the clarity we needed to spot where we went off route, and one by one, we were able to knock off the remaining pitches, and with immense delight and relief, we were soon standing atop the cliffs on solid ground, on a plateau on a windless bluebird day.

Almost botching up one last direction, the language barrier again presenting some mild difficulties while



▲ Rotten wooden blocks and corroded pitons protecting the cruxy traverse, relics from the aided first ascents of yesteryear

◀ The Alps di Siusi as seen from town

reading our notes, we eventually found the ridge to scramble back down on. We soldiered on down back to the town, with an hour to spare for the last bus back.

Retrospectively, there were other red flags. The notes mentioned a *Felsqualität* (rock quality) of *gut* (good), which we took at face value thanks to online translation. A mountain guide later told us that this was on a scale of several terms with the best being *ausgezeichnet* (excellent), meaning the route we were on rates closer to the bottom end.

Among the lessons learnt is the value of knowledge from locals. A more technical lesson is the importance of having two ropes for climbs of a long and/or alpine nature. Not just for rope drag and redundancy, but also for flexibility with descent options, two ropes allowing climbers to descend up to a full length of rope at a time.

Being more clued up about the route is an interesting one, if you have all the information you can muster, it can take some of the appeal away from the adventure. In our case, a video we took of us while in the cave has us trying to remember the name of the climb, even that we forgot!

A space blanket would have been nice to have too, and I've since been taking one on more and more trips. A more recent benightment in a canyon with Rob had him come up with the ingenious idea of propping two space blankets up with logs and using them as both a windbreak and a way to reflect the heat of a fire.

One takeaway while writing this was a reminder that most stories of this nature are often not borne from a single factor or snap decision, but are more likely the culmination of a number of factors. Easy said in retrospect!

▼ Sweeping views from the plateau







level up this slacklining season

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# Canoe Polo Champions 2019

## AGLAJA BUSCH & BRIGIT DOYLE

For a couple of years, canoe polo has been a featured part of the MUMC activities throughout the year. Canoe polo is a sport which combines aspects of water polo, basketball, kayaking and dodgem cars and therefore makes heaps of fun! This year several players met once a week at Essendon Canoe Club for a development training in a beginner friendly environment and went to interclub tournaments around Melbourne and Nagambie, where we were able to test our learned skills against other teams.

The highlight was the selection into the Victorian state women team to compete at the National Championships in Penrith, NSW. Next to the MUMC members Brigit and Aglaja, Squirrel, Jen, Bec and Josie made it into the team. Other states and the NZ national open women A, U21 A & B and U18 A & B teams were also invited – with a total of 10 womens teams it was promised to be a competitive tournament! So, all boats were strapped on top of the car and we hit the road towards the north. We were welcomed with canoe polo friendly weather of 25°C and sunshine which made it perfect weather for a weekend ahead full of this great outdoor team sport.

The first stage was the group phase where we played against all the other open womens teams. We managed to get further used to each other and run nice set-plays in the offence and defence, which were leading to several goals and wins against the other teams. Those were satisfying first two days which couldn't be better ending then with some cold drinks. As known around the world: "canoe polo is family" the players and other teams

camp and get together in the evening by professional sausage turning events on the BBQ and refill the body with new electrolytes in a social and relaxed environment. The third tournament day started with splitting the draw into the AUS state and NZ national teams where everyone played their own semi-finals and finals before competing in the super grand final with the winners of both countries.

In the semi-final we had a commanding win against Queensland and were therefore ready to play in the final against ACT. This game was full on from the first moment. Both teams fought hard and anything was left on the field. With our tight defence we didn't let ACT run their set-play and managed to get steals and regain possession of the ball. In the offence we act composed and let the ball run along the line of our outside players while the centre player tries to create a gap in the components defence. In the right moment we started our attack wave and passed the ball to the

player with the best shooting position – goal! We kept our concentration up throughout the game and could lock down the win with a score of 4-1. We achieved our main goal and were proudly Australian Champions! The super grand final was against the NZ national A team. The paddle ferns placed top 5 in the last world championships, so our plan was to have fun and play the best we could with the energy we had left. A last well-played game with a loss of 3-7 resulted in the silver medal in the open women division.

An awesome weekend was ending with sore muscles but also a medal around the neck and a big smile on the face!

▼ MUMC at Nagambie Competition  
(left to right): Anton, Gemma, Steve, Gavin, Taner, TJ and John







▲ Winning team (left to right): Josie, Bec, Squirrel, Aglaja, Brigit, Jen

▼ Team defence against NZ (for VIC (white) No.4: Brigit & No. 5: Aglaja)





## BRINGING THE HUT TO THE 21ST CENTURY

GUILLAUME STANGUENEC

### Chapter 1: How to install a solar panel on a mountain hut?

**I**t all started in February when Dan Cocker mentioned that it had been thinking about having lights powered by a solar panel at the MUMC hut. Hearing about it triggered an old desire of designing and building my own solar system. What a great opportunity I thought, it sounds simple enough, that should not take more than a couple of months, no doubt it will be done before Winter! Needless to say, that was a significant understatement. I naively ignored two facts, first, I had never

designed something even close to it and second, the hut is stuck on a mountain only accessible by foot.

Why did it take so long? I realised that was not only a solar panel but a whole electrical installation with energy storage being put together with various mechanical interfaces. Moreover, safety, reliability, ease of repair and people wishes had to be considered. As a result, it took me from February to April to have a first sketch of what the system should be and how everything would work together. At that time, I had to ignore where the lights would go and had strictly no idea how and where we would put the solar panel.

The hut is an important heritage of the club that we should care, maintain and improve. I had the vision to collaborate in all aspects of the project, unfortunately due to the equipment I only had access at work and my lack of time, that did not quite work out. However, the installation at the hut was truly the combination of skills, brain and physical power as I only had a vague idea on how to install what I had designed. Hugh, Jack, Anna, Lachlan and I carried all the equipment, found ideas and built what you now see at the hut. The collaboration aspect definitely made it fun, faster and improved the quality of the installation.





▲ Natalie and Bobur working the afternoon shift to fix a big leak at the entrance

◀ Hut maintenance trip, May 2019

## Chapter 2: Is there a controversy?

Another part of the collaboration which happened early on was a consultation within the club on what we would want and whether there were some oppositions. I quickly found out there was a range of ideas and opinions from having a heater to “we should never have electricity in the hut”. The last one came from an old member I met on the razorback which almost discouraged me from pursuing the project. Fortunately, during the discussion with the current members, we quickly reached a vision which was a simple system in which the power you can get out of is no more than what you would get from a power bank. In the meantime, extra capacity is available for maintenance trips which is in my opinion where the real value is. The hut needs a fair bit of work such as fixing roof leaks, tackling condensation issues and fixing some of the rotten beams. Anyone who have been on a maintenance trip has most likely realised that the biggest limitation is running out of battery from drills and other power tools. The system was put in good use during its installation as we charged the battery drill six times.

In my mind another big argument for the project is the spirit of

innovation the hut has had from its construction. Peter the architect could have chosen a simple structure, instead he went for Dome with complex geometrical shapes. At a smaller scale, the solar installation follows the same tradition and the club should never be afraid of changes and adapt to its time.

## Chapter 3: Lessons learnt

1. People are naïve: Jack was carrying the solar panel on the back of his backpack. On the way to the hut, we saw quite a lot of people as it was a long weekend. Jack managed to make them believe that he carried, a flat screen TV, a tennis table, a picnic table and more.
2. Rivets are better than screws and bolts: While Hugh and Jack were fixing a node of the roof, I undertook to build the frame to hold the panel with bolt and screws. After a full day of work, I realised that I made a mistake in my calculations and some of the angles were off. Hugh suggested to rebuild one and use rivets to re-build it... it took 10 times less to assemble and looked sturdier.
3. 2X: That's the time it actually takes to finish a project you have never done. It started in February and thought It would be finished in June... We ended up installing the system the first weekend of November.



▲ Jack, Lachlan and Hugh with their unusual overnight gear.





## Parting Shot Cup of Tea

Johannes about to run the last waterfall of the seven teacups in the Radal de Siete Tazas National Park in Chile. Photo: Anja Füchtbauer







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