

The Bulletin

Newsletter of the Otago Tramping and Mountaineering
Club Inc #843 September 2024



Tahakopa River, Catlins Weekend. 21-22 September 2024. Pic Sue Williams

In this edition we have reports of the club's September adventures in the great outdoors: a weekend of multiple activity in the Catlins based in Papatowai, day trips in the Silverpeaks (Cedar Spur, Swine spur etc) and the epic Powder Ridge-Greengage circuit. Additionally Teresa Wasilewska gives us a review of her husband, Arthur's work on the cherished River Track as it is formally incorporated in the DoC track system. Finally there is a review by Tracy Pettinger of the book by Te Araroa walker, Victoria Bruce, who recently spoke at a clubnight of her experiences on that trail with her young daughter.

Recently formally adopted by DOC, the South Branch River Track/Phil's Track/Arthur's Track has been over 12 years in the making and is proving to be a real benefit born of tragedy. - By Teresa Wasilewska

In March 2009, due to predicted high winds and storms, Club member Arthur Blondell and his friend Phil Cox decided to cut short a planned trip up the Valley of Trolls and beyond. Driving back, they were hit by a drunk driver on the wrong side of the road just outside Millers Flat, killing Phil instantly and injuring Arthur.

Phil was well known for his outdoor pursuits having participated in multiple Coast to Coast races, Southern Traverse events as well as Harriers and kayaking and his generosity in encouraging others of all abilities to “give it a go” as well as being hugely respected professionally as a skilled and compassionate maxillary facial dental surgeon. His widow Jane fully supported the establishment of a Trust which funded the Phil Cox Memorial Hut, which was formally opened on Yellow Ridge in March 2012.

Jane spoke about the hut being a place of safety, as Phil was always meticulous about safety in the hills, whatever activity he was pursuing. Robin Thomas, DOC conservator at the time, was contact person (with Antony Hamel contributing) for the planning of the project and discussed the DOC hope for a circuit track of the Silver Peaks that would remain on the true left of the Waikouaiti River from Yellow Ridge to the main Silver Peak Car Park, avoiding the need to walk through the forestry section of Mountain Road, keeping the track entirely on DOC domain. Recovered from his injuries, Arthur took on the challenge with relish and started scoping the route in late 2012.

Over the last 12 years, Arthur (at time accompanied by Green Hut Track Clearing Group members Brian Laws, Graeme Elliot and Mike Neill) has driven out to the Silver Peaks once, sometimes twice, occasionally 3 times 50 weeks of each year to plan, work, and fine tune the track. Antony Hamel took the inaugural OTMC trip through in August 2017 and the track has since been utilized frequently for circuit trips as well as access to other tracks along the route. Arthur estimated this has involved a total of over 500 days/4000 hours of work, 2000 kms of travel, and unknown amount for purchase of waratahs, timber for 200 +steps as well as board walk, netting, anchors wiring and screws. Not to forget visits to second hand shops whenever we travelled to add to his collection of grubbers, picks, shovels and sledgehammers – latterly left in the bushes on site to avoid having to carry the whole lot in each week!

Signage is important in keeping with Phil’s focus on safety and we believe that DOC will be replacing many of the ones Arthur has placed during the construction years. The Conservation Management Plan states “...new opportunities inspire more people to enjoy and become aware of the Silverpeaks Scenic Reserve” and this track, completing the circuit without a 6km road walk, certainly allows recreational users to access the area with more safety and (hopefully) enjoyment.

PS - Although Arthur reports the track as “finally” completed on 24 May 2024, he continues to vanish into the Silver Peaks to “tidy up” a section or two, check out the benching, re-establish a bit of bridging....feel free to break up some rock, or dig some benching if you meet up with him in there!

Contributed by the South Branch Track widow, Teresa!

T r i p R e p o r t s

1 Sept . Flagstaff - Swampy - Swine Spur - Ben Rudd's. By Helen Emerson

Thirteen set off on a warm, first-day-of-spring morning, in glorious sunshine, to tackle a circuit around Flagstaff, Swampy, Swine Spur, Possum Busters, the Jim Freeman track and the Firebreak track, also taking in the Bruce Campbell rhododendron dell and the Ben Rudd site.

This trip had been rescheduled from earlier in the winter (when poor weather saw us take shelter in a Silverstream day trip instead) and the benefit of rescheduling was that the first of the rhododendrons were in flower.



Lunch-break somewhere west of Flagstaff. Pic Ed.

But first, we climbed Flagstaff - starting from the Bullring carpark - down to the Swampy junction and off along the Swampy summit track. Familiar territory for most, but no less enjoyable in the glorious warm spring sunshine. A short morning tea stop along the route (and a sighting of a fern bird!) and before we know it we are in sight of the summit of Swampy and the 'UFO' and the junction with the top of Swine Spur. The track starts off flat and dry enough at the top, but soon descends quickly as a bit of a stream. It's not impossible - just a bit squelchy and slippery underfoot. There's some sizeable bogs to navigate as the track flattens out on this section of Swine Spur.

Lunch was had at the 4-way junction with Possum Busters - perfectly sheltered and sunny at midday at this time of year. And then off again along Possum Busters -

noting and ignoring all the other track junctions and navigating quite a bit more bog. It would take a considerable bit of track maintenance to drain these, or prevent them filling up again - its just part of the fun of these tracks!

Once on the Jim Freeman the track dries up considerably - in no small part as the track starts to climb up the western flank of Flagstaff. And of course once we enter the OTMC property we know we are truly home and dry. A pause at the bench and a history lesson from Richard about the pine tree plantings before entering the Bruce Campbell rhododendron dell - and we were rewarded with two different rhodos of the *calophytum* species in full bloom. Richard kindly guided us around the loop track (I swear he said 'track' - it was definitely a loop of bush bashing) to see them close up - but you'd need to be about 15 feet tall to really see them up close these days! It will be worth a repeat visit to the area in another month to see the later-flowering ones out.

And then it's up, up, up to the top of the Jim Freeman track and the Ben Rudd shelter where we had another stop, a lounge in the sun, signed into the book, checked the (dry) water hole, and eventually made our way back to the cars via the Firebreak track.

A great day out - thanks to all who joined me in the hills. What a great start to spring!

Helen Emerson for Rebecca Armstrong, Jenny Forrest, Margo Ferguson, Lucy Jones, Rob Seeley, Alison Kim, John West, Tracy and Richard Pettinger, Kate Botting, Kristy McNeil, and Nic Kearns.

7th Sept. Aramoana Mole (family trip). Leader: Rebecca Armstrong.



The Mole. Storm coming on. pic Annie Kurien Yohannan

8th Sept. Cedar Spur, Silver Peaks. By Ed.

Eight people showed up on a superb spring day to do this circuit in the silver peaks. We seem to be quite thoroughly working our way through the tracks of the Waikouaiti River this year and a descent of the Miner's Direct track and ascent of Cedar Spur are new ground. Miner's seems to have been given yet more TLC from the Green Hut group and the steep sections have been replaced or duplicated by zig-zagging alternatives.

Just a short blip on the River Track passing the Cedar Direct option brought us to the Spur track's start, well sign-posted in big friendly letters.

Rebecca had warned of some bush-bashing was in the offing but it really wasn't bad. One's backpack got stuck between the kanuka poles here and there and



At the bottom of Cedar Spur. Pic: Rebecca

there may have been a bit of route-finding and tree-fall - I don't know, I was at the back, always a good decision and avoids having spider webs plastered over your moosh. Once up in the sun we found a fine possie for a spot of kai and re-cafeination and, I have no doubt, for an earnest discussion on import issues of the day. Someone passed round some excellent chocolate, that much I do remember.

On we climbed and the vegetation became more varied as,

presumably, we left the older farmed areas. Saplings of the native cedar, which must have given the ridge its name, appeared with their parents filling the top of the gullies to either side where they'd survived the original clearing of the land.

Towards the top you see the dark mass of Rosella Ridge up ahead and the track steepens considerably. Breathing heavily then, we arrived on the ridge, Cedar Spur now completed, to stand in full sun and admire the views: the sea in front and the Cat's Teeth rocks silhouetted on Rocky Ridge behind. Two more short climbs on the top section of Rosella and a third up Green ridge got us to the base

of Pulpit Rock. We would delay climbing it until after lunch, which we ate further along the track in its lee while enjoying the view to the North.

Then it was down the main track all the way to the car-park which, let's face it, is a bit of a slog after the Green Hut site, there being hardly any views beyond the person in front's backback.

A fine walk enjoyed by all though, and on the return, we rewarded ourselves with a visit to the Waitati garden-centre cafe with its sugary cakes. Thanks for Rebecca's leadership and Sally for her recommendation of Shoegoo as a 'keep your favourite boots going' solution.

Rebecca Armstrong, Jenny Forrest, Helen Emerson, Aleksandra Kozyk, Rob Seeley, Holly Yang, Margo Ferguson, Sally Anderson

^{15th} Sept. Silverstream-Greengage Circuit. By Jenny Forrest

Overview: From silver stream carpark, up Powder Ridge to Pulpit Rock then down Greengage Track to Silverstream, along river and back via Racemans.

Attendees: (6) Mark Stevenson (leader), Rob Seeley, Helen Emerson, Jenny Forrest, Theresa Fogarty, Fiona Shine.

Conditions: muddy to wet under foot

Weather: damp to wet, light winds, misty on summit, approx. 10⁰

Vital Statistics:

Distance: 30.6km; 32,984 steps

Ascent: 991m

Moving Time: 7 hours

Average Speed 4.4km /hour

Elapsed Time: 8 hrs 50mins

So this is my third tramp with the club and first report so please bear with me. I have also been in New Zealand less than three weeks having travelled from Devon to work here for 6 months. This day trip, organised by Mark was advertised as 6-7 hours but having spoken to others it was suggested likely to be longer and so it proved: bring plenty of food and a torch was good advice although the latter not needed in the end.

The six of us set off from the car park at 09:30 and for Theresa and Fiona it was their first tramp with the club. The forecast was mixed but we set off in mild, dry conditions. It was commented that the first ford crossings were higher than usual after heavy rain in the week and many thus started with wet feet but we all knew

that by the end we would all have soaked feet. We headed over the swing bridge and along the track before turning off up Powder Ridge track. A long steady ascent, poles very helpful as muddy and slippery under foot. For me, like being back home with mud and drizzle. We had a coffee stop at midday when we reached Long Ridge and admired the view across to Pulpit Rock. At this point the drizzle started and we soon put on raincoats as we headed on along Long Ridge and up to Pulpit Rock. As we debated going to the top we happened upon Rebecca and Tina who were out for their own day tramp. We declined a shortened walk back with them and continued. As Fiona had not been to the top we were obliged to summit and even though the views were less than last weekend it was atmospheric with the mist swirling around the summits and between the ridges.



A stroll down the river in the late afternoon. Pic: Ed.

A quick lunch (13:45) sheltering under the bushes below Green Hill before heading down the Greengage track to the river as the rain became heavy for about an hour. This was steep and slippery and a few of us had some slips on to our backsides in the mud but no injury just ego dented.

About 15:15 we arrived at the river and after a quick bite to eat headed downstream. This was heavy going through icy water, clambering under overhanging trees and over boulders, up banks to avoid deeper 'swimming holes' at times but we persevered and a long one and a half hours later were please to see the weir and so Racemans Track.

From there we made faster progress back to the cars arriving in daylight at 18:20. All a little soggy and tired looking forward to baths, beers and a hot meal. A great, if challenging day out. Thank you Mark for devising and leading the trip and everyone for their companionship.

21st-22nd Sept. Catlins Camping [and Motelling]. By Andrew Nichols

Early mark on Friday all packed and off by 3.30pm ...heading south into a gloomy rain. Oh dear. This isn't looking too good. However, by Balclutha it had buttoned



Have you seen this bird?

off and clear bright sky beckoned as we headed off through Owaka into the Heart of Darkness...Oops Wrong narrative! Back to reality we arrived at the camp and discovered that DOC was covertly converting Papatowai into a wetland with wheel divot ponds and standing water, a feature of most the surface. In small less wet plots, earlier party members had set up their tents....Yeah... Nah!

Off to the motel across the road for a comfy bed with electric blanket and searing hot shower...Ooooooh yeah! Next morning, rendezvous in an icy wet camp landscape with tents cars and kayaks under a veneer of the night's sleet. Wx was fine and increasingly mild! Yay.

Then off went the convoy to Waipohatu Loop track with its 2 lovely waterfalls (Nice bit of mud and sandflies for those of us already missing the recent NW Circuit). Most went in and out but our smaller party of 5 did the full loop and found the others had gone off to Slope Pt. We headed direct to Curio Bay to find Basil Fawlt's German son and his crew staffing the Tea room, completely uninterested in acknowledging the presence of customers and then serving others who'd ordered after us! Then most of the party headed back to camp at Papatowai where folks went for walks while others went kayaking the

marvellous Tahakopa Estuary with its fringe of Rata and Ngutukaka [Kakabeak, Ed.] -dominated forest right to the waters edge. As close as one could get to the Aotearoa that the first Maori waded ashore to in 13 something AD! I had sea run trout on the mind but no luck and to compound my failure, there is a trout landing net somewhere in the estuary bed. Off to a hot shower and bed after a barby and conviviality outside the Facilities block.

Sunday morning the party split up into those wanting to do a beach walk, the Tahakopa Reserve in search of a South Island Kokako and \$10,000 reward, and yet more fine waterfall tracks including Matai, Purakaunui and Rata falls (and others whose names I can't remember – There really are a heap of them), Railway embankments , Jacks superb chasm (not really a blowhole) a coffee and comestibles at Owaka



At Koropuku Falls. Pic: Roger Clarkson

(A staggering number of coffee bars and eateries in one small area) and finally the Tunnel walk. Home by 4pm.

Thanks so much to Rodger for organising such a chill weekend.

We were Rodger Clarkson, Sue Williams, Saskia Bronstring, Amy Telfer Chiles, Joe & Sharon Bretherton, Mark Stephenson, Sharon Campbell, Sharon Rutherford, Philip Somerville, Andrew and Liz Nichols, Rebecca and Kezia Armstrong.

^{29th} **Sept. Big Stone Road. By Tracy Pettinger.**

After a speedy ride through South Dunedin at the earlier than usual time to meet at 8am (but it was really 9am because we'd put the clocks forward the night before, to spring forward) Richard and I arrived in the nick of time to catch the other 5 before the group left the clubrooms.

We had a convoy of three cars to Mandie's house in Brighton to start the walk from there. And say hello to the dog.



Our walk was down to the beach and heading south into the wind. It was a beautiful day otherwise. We found a leopard seal lying around, looking a little thin. Mandie or Rebecca reported it to DoC. It didn't respond much, even when surrounded by keen photographers! It seemed not really interested in living any more, let alone chasing trampers.

There used to be houses along the cliff edge, but the sea has encroached on the coast. The houses are gone, but the sea's erosive force is exposing garden refuse tips, where in 'the good old days' people would bury their rubbish in the garden.

We also saw a couple of big white teddy bears having a hug and looking out to sea. Maybe a work of art? Are they waiting for a loved one to return home from the sea?

After morning tea in the shelter of the cliffs, the next point of interest was 7.5 surf spot. It has a very comfy settee at the lookout which a few of us had to test out. It might be a little bit too comfortable if you were watching out for your friends in the surf. I can imagine nodding off quite easily up there in the sun.

Then we said goodbye to the beach and headed off inland, up the forestry road and away from the wind. And when we got up to the tops, we said hello to the wind again, which was whipping up the dust off the road. The gorse bushes up

there are prolific, and the yellow gold of the flowers are dazzling, in a nice weedy kind of way.

Mandie then took us across country to a lunch spot with a decaying old wreck of a house. When her children were young, she took a photo of them peeking through the upstairs window. Now there is just a front wall slumping into the ground in the final years of its existence. The occupants of the house planted lots of daffodils and jonquils which were in flower when we visited and will soon be the only remnant left of their passing. Although there is also a buried collection of very old medicine bottles buried in what was once the bottom of the weedy and minty garden.

We recalled with fond memories the taste and viscosity of Milk of Magnesia in the blue bottles and other strange and wonderful chemicals that our parents would give us, trusting that it was good for us.

After lunch we were back onto the forestry roads for a while. When we got to a junction where it is possible to detour to the stones of Big Stone Road, three intrepid hill climbers went up to touch the obelisk.

Apparently, it was a little further than they'd imagined, but it lived up to all expectations in being a very big stoney thing. They came back sweating and exhausted and woke us up.

At this point we were in the valley where Brighton's Akatore Creek winds down from the hills. Mandie said that the river was wider, and long ago her children swam in it. Now that it is surrounded by pine forest it is much smaller.

All the forestry side roads have women's names in that area.

It is interesting to hear of the changes around Brighton in Mandie's lifetime, as these days it seems that it is more unusual that a person lives most of their life in one area.

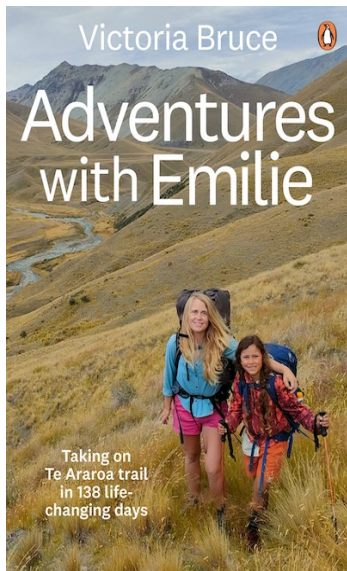
It is in this area that the new Smooth Hill city landfill will be active in the future and more changes will be happening. Nobody's children will be swimming in the river then, I guess.

After a quick relax in the garden, we left Mandie to her chores and went off for ice-creams from the shop at Brighton.

Tracy Pettinger, Richard Pettinger, Mandie Lungley, Rob Seeley, Rebecca Armstrong, Lindsay Aitcheson and Jenny Forrest.

Review of Victoria Bruce's book, *Adventures with Emilie* – by Tracy Pettinger

Recently we had Victoria and Emilie Bruce come and speak at the Tramping Club on a Thursday night. They were very familiar people by then to some of us, as they went on the Bretherton's trip to Stewart Island, Rakiura, to walk the North West Circuit.



A few of us bought the book *Adventures With Emilie* and a copy was purchased and signed for the OTMC library. It tells the story of how and why Victoria decided to take Emilie, who was only 7 years old at the time, to walk the length of New Zealand on the Te Araroa Trail. The reasons why they walked the trail are very important to the story of how it was walked. Everyone has their reasons for getting away from the rat race of life and doing something like this. It seems like from how life had treated her in the past that this is the logical, sensible thing to do, although at the time a person would have divided feelings about taking your only daughter into such an environment, if it weren't for the fact that tramping is the life for both of them. As a 7-year-old, she is a way more experienced

tramper than a lot of us.

As a non-New Zealander, I found this book hugely revealing in that it describes the way that this country allows people to get into a better headspace, within a place of beauty, fresh air, fresh water and freedom, to find challenge, a sense of wilderness, exercise, and self-realisation. I found it refreshing and illuminating how her daughter connected so closely with her decision to go for a walk for six months. It's a bond few mothers would ever experience. My husband and I got this from her talk, but her book expressed it so well, I commend it to you all.

It's now in the OTMC library. Published by Penguin ISBN 9781776950478 .

Many thanks to the people who contributed to this Bulletin! All contributions, text and photos, for future publications please to the editor: Rob Seeley :

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