The Bulletin

Newsletter of the Otago Tramping and Mountaineering Club Inc. #845 January-February 2025

Strider. From the Mavora Lakes weekend. Pic Rodger Clarkson

Here's a packed edition of the Bulletin for the first two months of 2025. It's been a pretty rubbish summer and we've done our best with it. What excellent photographers we have in the club, a fine sample of whose work appears here. One of the pleasures of being the Editor (and there are many; applicants for next year please form an orderly queue) is rummaging through what people have posted on Facebook or sent me and deciding which ones best illustrate the trip or the participants. Usually my favourite goes on the front page. Rodger's pic up there expresses well the joy and freedom of a good day on the tops.

Jan. **Dec 28-4th Arthurs Pass**
19 Nicols Creek
25-26 ABC Cave

Feb. **1-2 Brewster Hut**
8 Wakari-Speirs Rd potluck
15-16 Mavora Lakes/Mt Campbell
16 Swampy Circuit
22 OTMC Half Marathon

T r i p R e p o r t s

OTMC New Years Trip to Arthurs Pass. 28 Dec 2025 - 4 Jan 2024

Introduction

Steffan Rolfe organised an awesome 8-day trip to the Arthur's Pass area for NY 2024-25. Huge thanks to Steffan for planning out a range of options of day and overnight trips, and then putting together the best schedule for the conditions (weather, health, numbers), and accommodating all skills, fitness, and motivation. The core team (Steffan, plus Rebecca Armstrong, Shirley Welsh, Tomas Sobek, Rob Orchiston, Magdalena Hamiwala, Sabine de Klein, Helen Emerson) were joined by additional OTMC members who 'happened' to be in and around the area. At one point there were 17 OTMC members in the village. The final trip schedule was this:

Day 1 - Travel to Arthur's Pass village, and quick jaunt up the Otira valley
Day 2 - Mt Aichen
Day 3 - Cave Stream and Arthur's Pass track
Day 4 - Goat Pass
Day 5 - Avalanche Peak (the 'A' Team) Temple Basin and Bealey Valley (OTMC Botany club)
Day 6 - Into Dillon Hut two ways
Day 7 - Walking out from Dillon Hut (Taipo Valley)
Day 8 - Homeward bound (via Castle Hill Rocks, Sheffield, Oamaru, various cheese shops …)

Arrival on Day 1 (Shirley)

The OTMC's New Year Camp was held Arthurs Pass this year. Two cars carrying Rob, Sabine, Helen, Rob, Steffan, Tomas and me left Dunedin that morning and arrived at the Alpine Lodge at 5.30pm. The afternoon light shone on the mountains and there was a warm breeze. It was so beautiful, that Rob decided to do the Otira Valley walk up to the bridge. Helen, Rebecca, Sabine and I joined him. At 6 pm we wended our way along a well formed shingle path dotted with Mountain Daisies and Mount Cook Lilies. We were surrounded by water: the Otira River, a waterfall, small streams and pools. On the way, we met David and Jane, the owners of Earth Sea Sky who Rob last saw decades ago when Rob

worked in an outdoor shop. Rebecca and Helen reminisced with them about the fabulous talk they had given to the Club about tramping gear. By this time, the sun had sunk behind a mountain, so we said goodbye to them, and headed on to the bridge. We took a few photos and then turned around to go back down to the car. On the way back down the hill, we stopped at a small pool to fill our water bottles with crystal clear water for our next day's outing. We were back at Arthur's Pass Alpine Club Lodge for dinner at 8 p.m. We were joined by Magdalena later that evening. Club members Michael and Bridget Priestnall were already at the Lodge, having arrived up a few days earlier.

Day 2 - Mt Aicken (Rob)

The team plus Michael left the NZAC Cabin at Arthurs Pass at 7.45am Sunday 29 Dec 2024, the first official outing of the week-long new years trip.

After a steep grind through the bush past the hydro intake, Rebecca, Helen and Shirley "summited" above the bushline, with sweeping views into Devils Punchbowl creek and made the journey to the waterfall after the descent.

Sabine, Steffan, Tomas, Mike and Magdalena at point 1844m on the descent. Photo : Rob Orchiston

A subset of 6 headed onwards up the ridge to the "Summit" of Mt Aicken. 99% of all persons agree that the highest point of prominence on a ridge is usually accepted as the summit. However the map shows an outlier peak 5m lower as the Summit. Due to fact it was just a lowly lower peak, and would have added another hour, we declined to do the extra unnecessary outlier "Mt Aicken". Total time 9hrs, 1500m ascent, 12.5km.

Day 3 - Cave Stream (Helen)

It was clear skies at 7.30am when we arrived at Cave Stream - the forecast rain hadn’t arrived and it was sunny and warm as we descended to the cave entrance.

Having reviewed the safety information, we assessed the water levels (fine), checked our head torches, and took the obligatory team photo.

Name that caver.. *pic: Sharon Bretherton*

And then we are off. The cave is 594m long. It starts with a drop into a fairly deep pool of water. It quickly rises. Knee height, mid thigh, creeping up … can we keep our underwear dry? Nope, at least not for the shorter team members!

The caves are stunning - the water-carved sculptures reach up and away, and small new holes of graceful curves are being created by stones swept down the cave. Plenty of handholds on the curves make for relatively easy navigation - the limestone rock glows against the darker boulders that are doing the creative work. I think of Barbara Hepworth and the graceful curves of her stone sculptures.

But into more practical matters - navigation up-stream through the cave. The limestone is smooth and grippy underfoot, and when the water is fast flowing - and it's often very fast flowing - this makes a huge difference. We arrive at 'Bidet 1' (aka the 1m step scramble described by DOC) - anyone who had a dry crotch up to now, well, Bidet 1 saw to that. Fast flowing water through a deep and narrow channel. The only way was to haul yourself through it, and that has only one outcome. Re-grouping on the other side of it we compared notes on degrees of soaked-ness and carried on … to Bidet 2 (a 1.5m 'step' up) and if anyone was still dry after Bidet 1, well they weren't anymore!! Even faster flowing, deep pools at the bottom - there was no way to navigate that one without fully engaging with a spread-eagled-launch-yourself-upwards technique that was guaranteed to soak you from the waist down. All good - what's a bit more water at this stage?

After this, anything is fair game and it's more beautiful cathedral-like expanses as you glance upwards, more gracious curves carved in the rocks, and plenty of clear water rushing towards us. A shimmy under a rock, another couple of steps, and suddenly, there's the rung ladder that is going to lead us up and out of the cave. Shall we do it all again? - yes please! We didn't, but a second team of OTMC members were arriving as we left, for their own adventure through the cave. We later caught up with at lunch in the village - and by now the rain had set in. Perfect timing!

Despite the rain, 5 elected to be dropped at the top of Arthur's Pass and walk back to the Village on the Arthur's Pass track. It was a pretty sodden walk, but beautiful all the same. The track is well formed so perfectly do-able in the rain.

Day 4 - Goat Pass

A team comprising Steffan, Tomas, Magdalena, Rob and Sabine, and trip 'extras' Michael, Joe and Sharon took on the challenge of Goat Pass, with a support crew of Rebecca, Bridget and Shirley who elected to walk in and out at each end, and shift the cars between and start and finish points. The team went up the Deception valley, passing Upper Deception Hut, Goat Pass Hut, over the pass, the Mingha Bivouac, and down the Mingha valley. The number of river crossings was something in the region of 30+, and it was a long day, but everyone came back happy and exhausted.

Deceptive: Crossing the Deception. *pic: Tomas Sobek*

Day 5 - Avalanche Peak (Tomas)

Even though day 4 was a big day, four of us decided we are not ready for a rest day just yet. We'll start New Year with a real walk. Rob, Sabine, Magdalena, and Tomas set off on a very straightforward route just after breakfast: Out of the door, turn left, and follow the water pipeline until we hit the official part of Avalanche Peak Track. Continue along to the peak.

This particular track is somewhat steep. So much so that I put away my hiking poles to free up my hands, and it didn't take long to warm up that day. We passed the famous waterfall on Avalanche Creek at 10:20 am -- the one you can see through the glass wall of the small church at Arthur's Pass village. An hour or so later we started kissing the clouds. A few fit people passed us as we were cruising our way up, I guess they didn't do 30kms the day before. Or maybe they did and we are just slackers in comparison, who knows? Nevertheless by about 1 pm we all stood on top of Avalanche Peak admiring the clouds around us, almost 1100 metres higher than where we started a few hours before.

On the way down we took the less steep and less knee-busting Scotts Track. It turned out to be a lovely place to spend the afternoon. We were hanging around the cloud line for quite some time. It was calm and atmospheric, with the clouds coming and going, and nobody was rushing back to civilisation.

Day 5 - OTMC botany club outing (Helen)

A few of us took an easier option on day 5. We headed up Temple Basin to check out the ski lodges, and we were treated to an alpine plant lovers best day out. Having read about a ‘new’ plant identification app in an old copy of Wilderness magazine in the Lodge, the going was slow as we stopped to ‘identify’ every orchid, daisy and alpine herb as we went. We saw the South Island Edelweiss, Mount Cook lilies, the insectivorous sundew, horizontal leek, and odd-leaved orchids. For anyone interested, the app is ‘Aotearoa Species Classifier’.

We headed back to the Lodge via the Arthur’s Pass Track - a very well maintained walking path between the village and the Dobson Memorial at the pass summit. This is a great track for families and visitors wanting to get a taste of area - passing Jacks Hut, the Bridal Veil Falls, and a detour takes you to the Devils Punchbowl Falls at the village end of the track. On this day, we took an extra, short, detour up the Bealey Valley, just because we could. The weather was a

vast improvement on the previous walk along this track, and we enjoyed more plant identification stops on our way back to the lodge.

Day 6 - Over the Pass, up the Valley - two ways into Dillon Hut

Rata trees in full bloom. Taipo River (?). *pic: Tomas*

We again split into two teams - one to go over the Kelly Saddle via Carroll Hut, and the 7 Mile Creek track. This team was Steffan, Tomas and Sabine, and they set off at 9am to head up to Carroll Hut. The second team (Helen, Rebecca, Rob and Shirley) drove the cars around to the Taipo River [running white with correction fluid? -Ed]. The goal was to meet at Dillon Hut for the night. The walk up the Taipo River valley is a cruisy way in to Dillon Hut - mostly a 4WD track up the river, finally crossing Seven Mile Creek at the Dillon Homestead Hut, before a final 10 min walk to the newer and lovely 10-bed Dillon Hut for the night. The Taipo River team arrived at the Hut by around 1pm and after a short snack, Rob and Helen decided to head on up the 7 Mile Creek track to meet the others coming over from the Kelly Saddle. Bets were placed on how far we'd go before we met them, and just as we had sat down (at 4pm) to calculate how much further or longer we would need to walk, we heard voices coming down the track. Yeah - we knew it was 2 hours back to Dillon Hut - so they'd had a long day.

It was a fun evening at Dillon Hut - the rules of the games got sillier as the night wore on. A sign of a good day's tramping, good food and a hut all to ourselves.

Day 7 - Exiting Dillons Hut via the Taipo River valley.

It was an easy day walking out, and the weather gods were smiling - at least on this side of the divide. The ratas were really showing off in the sunshine. It's only a couple of hours back to the road, so clearly there's time to stop at the Otira pub on the way back to the Lodge. Some much needed cleaning of the NZAC Arthur's Pass Lodge was planned - not only because we had been in residence for the last week, but there's a high volume of people passing through - some only for a one-night stay - and those rubbish bags, the showers, the floors - they don't clean themselves - and clearly there's a lack of people chipping in to do the work. So it was the OTMC Cleaning Team to the rescue, and I am sure the Lodge was cleaner when we left than when we arrived!

Day 8 - Home with plenty of stops

Final farewells to Magdalena who is moving north to a new job (we hope you can join in future OTMC trips, Magdalena - you are always welcome!), and we are on the road to our first stop of the day, the Castle Hill Rocks. A bit of climbing, general larking about, and definite reluctance to leave the area, but after an hour or so we are on our way again. We have a perfectly timed stop at Sheffield, for elevenses, or brunch, if you prefer; pie is right at any time of day. And so apparently is cheese, as one car group had a much longer trip back with extra stops …

Huge thanks to Steffan for all the organising, planning, researching and weather watching he did in the lead up and during the week, to make sure we got the best out of our time away. There's plenty more to do in the area - another OTMC week trip up there could do a completely different set of tramps. Well, best get planning then ….

Sun 19 Jan. Nicols Creek and Falls. By Mark Stephenson

This trip to Nichols Creek, ably led by Charlotte and Chris, began with a cold, drizzly start. Our glorious leaders were joined by:
Sandy who piked early (No Hoyle, Mun!)*, Mark, Laurence, Lucy, Rebecca, Helen, Fiona, Deb, Sandra, Stephanie, Joanna, Mark, Rob, Tom, Jenny, Andrea, Abdul, and Georgia.*

A raggle-taggle procession of members, non-members, pre-members, post-members, can't remembers, gold members, gold-card members, silver-haired members, mumblers, non-mumblers, and bloody students!

An Impressive turnout. The Nichols Creek Trip. pic: Charlotte Handley

We climbed the Workman's Track to gain the views for morning tea. From then on the weather was clear as we wound our way up to the tops via the MTB track. After a quick break, we walked down for lunch at Pineapple Point. It was so warm I almost took my jumper off.

20 people turned out on such a day, and the sun shone after all. What more do you need? The OTMC is in good hands.

Jan 25-26 ABC Cave trip. By Tom Kirk
Content warning: this report makes frequent reference to guano. -Ed.

4 of us aimed to stay overnight at ABC cave plus 2 day-walkers joined us for part of the trip.
Off we go down a steep hill then heading anti-clockwise along the river track. Was pretty dry, no mud. Stopped at Phillip J Cox Hut for a bite to eat and meet runner. Our two day-walkers started their journey back just before the gap.

Cloud was starting to roll in over the gap and made for some great visuals - hills, views, and moving clouds. One of us continued onto the hut saying "you won't be able to see anything", while the rest dropped our packs and scrambled atop/along the side of the two sides of the gap. With the fast moving cloud we had some good moments of big clear views and cloud rolling across. Weather was good, not cold (it *was* a summer trip).

We picked up our packs again and met another hiker who had also been going to stay at ABC cave – but was grossed out by the "bird poop" and decided to head to Phillip J Cox Hut- that was really UPSELLING our cave adventure! Continued onto the 'hut' to find the earlier lone walker had scraped some big piles of bird poop off the platform. Lucky there was a nice plastic sheet so on arrival it almost looked homely. (Thanks! I think there might have been quite a bit of cleaning done by the time of our arrival).

The Team at Phil Cox Hut. Pic: Tom Kirk

Relaxed in cave, chattered, ate, played cards, talked to our bird friends in the nest in the cave and watched the lovely sunset go down. Someone* pulled the short straw and slept under the bird nest. Ploop, ploop, ploop in the night.

Up the next day, a small dose of rain began but soon stopped. Off down into the valley of the Jubilee Hut where we stopped for a break next to the creek. Some lovely camping spots around here. Slog up Devils Staircase. Another side trip to Silver Peak for a bite to eat again and another scramble, then headed out. Rain came on as we passed green hill / old hut site but we were out by about 2-3pm Sunday. A quick side trip to Arc Brewing on the way home for end of trip drinks.

Tom Kirk, Mark Stephenson (thanks for leadership), Jenny Forrest, Andrew Nichol. Plus Helen Emerson and Rebecca Armstrong (part-time).
* A little bird told me t'was the author. Ed.

Feb 1-2. Mt Armstrong. By Nathan Dawson

The weather window for the Brewster Hut trip looked fantastic. The group were going to be mesmerized by the mountain scenery that was about to quickly confront them the following day.

We left Dunedin in our respective groups on Friday night and drove to Kidds Bush camp area at the edge of Lake Hawea.

The weather was serene when we arrived and the temperature allowed me to have a quick dip in the lake before it got dark. Gordon, Sabine and Jenny arrived later in the evening and they joined us down by the lake setting up the tents while the sun set .

Mt Brewster and the team . *Pic: Nathan*

We woke to a glorious clear cool morning and we hastily packed up and headed off to the start of the track near Fantail Falls carpark. Jo and Rob joined us at the turn-off to Kidds Bush, as they had made their way up independently.

Luckily, the river levels were low which allowed us to cross without our feet getting too wet. The track rose steeply from the river and it wasn't long before we found the vista starting to open up from such a quick ascent in a short distance.

The further we climbed towards the edge of the bush line the views opened up even more with vistas of mountain ranges in all directions.

When we arrived at the true alpine level we transitioned onto a blunt knife-like ridge. The ridge was clearly defined ahead of us like a path disappearing into the cloud above and off to our right heading up the ridge was Mt Armstrong, which we would be scaling later on in the day.

The peak was obscured with clouds rolling in over the tops. As we scaled closer to the hut the view off to our left was breathtaking entailing Brewster Glacier and Mt Brewster.
Before we knew it the ascent started to level out a little and the hut seemed near. There was a steady stream of people undertaking day and overnight walks. Behind the hut we could see the undefined route zigzagging up the hill. The views at the hut were even more enchanting, but we weren't to know just how amazing the views would be further up the track.
We stopped for a quick bite to eat, filled in the hut intentions-book, packed our day packs with some snack food and warm clothing and headed off for the top of Mt Armstrong. The route was not defined and we picked our way through the rocky outcrops and scree which abound, lit with a colour pallet of the alpine plants.

The temperature dropped dramatically at the top of Mt Armstrong and the views we were hoping for had unfortunately been temporarily suppressed by the cloud. Nevertheless, the view down the back of the mountain was incredible, making one feel very insignificant in comparison to the grandeur of mother nature.
As we descended the mountain the views of the glacier and Mt Brewster were constantly staring us in the face, making us stop for many individual and group poses. As our elevation dropped the cloud and cooler wind started to disappear.
We continued to descend and carefully made our way across the face of Mt Armstrong closer to the glacial lake at the bottom of Brewster Glacier. The weather here was still very warm and settled. We made good time to soak in the grandeur of the glacier in the late afternoon light. Boy! The views were something out of this world. The layers of colours and textures were infinitely diverse.
But we had to force ourselves away from this enchanting alpine environment we were bathing ourselves in, time was getting on and we needed to get back to the hut before the sun disappeared. We made good progress back along the face of Mt Armstrong. There were a few times we had to stop to check we were on the correct path, as there were many false alternative routes. We arrived back at the hut just in time to enjoy the last of day's sun, along with a magical lingering sunset.
We gathered around in the light of our headlamps basking in the good vibes and endorphins the day had brought for us. We headed off to bed with our bellies full and souls filled with the goodness of these magical alpine environments.
We woke in the morning to another glorious day. We quickly packed up, filled out tanks with food and sadly headed off down the trail back to cars. We made good time, carefully choosing where to put each step as the descent down was very undulating and steep.

Thanks Gordon for arranging a wondrous weekend in such amazing company. Party members: Gordon Tocher, Nathan Dawson, Jenny Forrest, Sabine de Klein, Nathan Dawson, Sharon Campbell, Rob Darby and Jo Bizo.

Feb 8 Wakari Potluck. Leader Rebecca Armstong.

Seven people were on this trip on a beautiful Saturday starting and finishing at Rebecca's where a meal was had. From Rebecca's description:

We'll head up Taieri Rd, then climb up Spiers Rd and Spiers track towards the main Flagstaff track just below the summit, crossing Ben Rudd's original farm site. From Flagstaff summit, we'll head down the Pineapple (new or old options) and McGoun's tracks and through the mountain bike tracks to Wakari Rd, returning via the roads to Rebecca's place to finish with an optional Potluck dinner.

Feb 15-16 Mavora/Mt Campbell (Plan B). By Sue Williams

The original plan was for a trip to Canyon Creek, in the Ahuriri area, however this didn't seem so appealing when there was the prospect of a long road walk. There has been some flood damage to the road, so it would be possible by 4WD, but not 2WD's. I called the Twizel DoC office and the ranger said that they may have

On Mt Campbell Ridge looking north *pic: Kelly Hibbert*

some funding for road repairs. The situation could be a whole lot better now. If you're planning to go that way, give them a ring and let us all know.

After some racking of the brain and a suggestion, I floated the idea of Mt Cambell at Mavora instead. It was decided and we were all able to leave early on Friday and get to the camp-site before dark. The weather forecast was for hot weather, so we planned to get going early.

We set off at 8am, so that we could get as high as possible before the beating sun. We walked along the 4WD track to the end of the bush and then headed across a couple of paddocks and then upwards. The best route is on the true right towards a saddle at about 1240m. We managed to gain the saddle before the sun really hit us. We then continued up along a broad ridge with fabulous views of both Mavora Lakes and in all directions.

After lunch the ridge became narrower and involved a little bit of maneuvering around rock stacks, some rock jumbles and scree. We picked a route around the north side of Mt Campbell and finally dropped down a scree slope, up and down across some moraine rock until we reached the tarn at about 1380m. The tarn is quite deep, so I think it would always have water in it. We did decide to boil it as there were a few sheep (deceased) scattered around it. There are a few reasonable campsites and lots of uncomfortable ones.

Rodger, Mark and I went for an afternoon walk up to a saddle for more views of Mavora Lakes and Southland. After dinner, we tried to chase the sun by moving around to the other side of the tarn. The sun dropped fairly early which meant it was too cold to sit around. There was some wind in the night gusting around to keep us awake.

In the morning we headed away early and we were quite pleased at how quickly we got back up to the ridge. Because the wind was building up, we dropped lower, traversed a big basin and climbed back up once we were back at the main wide ridge, avoiding the narrow ridge combined with gusty wind. Then we did the knee-punishing descent and we were back down to the 4WD track by 12pm.

Everyone (except me) had a swim at the South Mavora Lake and we hit the road. Compulsory stop for an ice-cream, with licorice being the big favourite.

We could have walked up to the end of the bush and camped there to save time on a hot Saturday morning. This is a trip that I would be happy to do again sometime.

Thanks from me, Sue Williams to the team, who were Rodger Clarkson, Mark Stephenson, Sharon Rutherford, Tom Kirk and Kelly Hibbert.

16th Feb. Swampy Circuit. 24 in 24 (km in Deg C - give or take). Helen Emerson

On what might have been the hottest day in Dunedin so far, three gathered in the Bullring carpark at 9am to do a warm-up for next week's Half Marathon. This 'Swampy 20km+ figure of 8' route was most recently completed in April 2024 and the team today had a time to beat, and muscles to warm up for next week.

So off up Flagstaff (summit, 9.20am) in glorious sunshine, watching the cloud still gathered in the harbour. Across to Swampy (junction with Morrison Burn, 10.20am) and we reach the 'UFO' at 10.40. We are making a cracking time so far. And we are now seeing the cloud gathered in Blueskin Bay and beyond. Today was not a day to go north of Dunedin for the beaches. The Silverpeaks are looking mighty fine and we trace out our route for next weekend - Powder Ridge and Long Ridge look, well, long from here!

Swampy circuiteers *pic: Helen*

Off over the top we go and turn off at Rustlers. The views just get better and better. But we have a route to cover. We drop down to the junction with the Burns track (11.20, too early for lunch. Shame, it's a nice spot). The next half of the Rustlers is a wee bit overgrown - I'm happy I've done this track a few times and can feel the track under my feet, as I can't really see it. Make the mental note (again!) to keep some secateurs in my day pack. Out loud I say 'must tell Rebecca about this and we could organise a wee working party up here.' Does writing in the trip report count as 'action taken'?

Onto the Pipeline track. The usual muddy spots are really quite dry and the creek very low. We find a nice spot for lunch (12.20, 12.5km completed). We don't linger - we reckon we are half way around and we still have the climb up the Leith Saddle to come. It's hot. We are happy in the bush down here.

1.17pm. We are at the 'Lookout' on the Leith Saddle track. There's just a slither of a view of Dunedin to see. No view to the north unless you stand on the bench seats.

We push on. Now we are above the tree line and the sun is beating down. 1.45pm and we are at the high point of this bit of track. Great views in all directions. 2pm sees us back at Swampy. We don't stop for yoga poses (see trip report of 28 April 2024. Ricky, we missed you today)

And then it's back to the Bullring. We know this. It's hot. We think how we might feel next week doing this stretch of the Half. More tired, muddier (for sure), not as hot? Time will tell. We acknowledge our land as we pass through the Ben Rudd property - we won't see this next week. But we don't stop at the shelter. That's for another trip.

And boom - we are back at the Bullring. 3.35pm. Not bad, not bad!

Thanks to Rob Darby and Kristy McNeill for the great company today. See you next Saturday for more Swampy fun!

22nd Feb. Half Marathon. By Helen Emerson

At 6am at the bottom of the Pineapple Track, ten trampers gathered with head torches, poles and anticipation galore. Not everyone knew each other - proper introductions would come later, when the sun rose. In the meantime, tramper no. 10 took our team photo, and waved us off (she will be joining us later as our Support Crew) and the nine of us set off in the dark up the Pineapple Track.

I had promised the team sunrise at the top of Flagstaff. Well, the timing was right (7.15am) just the sun failed to break through the clouds sufficiently. Introductions in daylight were completed and the obligatory 'summit shot' was taken. Down to the Bullring we go, with the agreement to stop for 2nd Breakfast in the car park there. Then it's probably the least interesting section of the route - down the dirt road to Whare Flat and the Silverstream tracks car park. No traffic though, and plenty of conversation as we made cracking pace (averaging 5.5km/hr up to this point).

Silverstream, and our first opportunity to get our feet wet, crossing the ford at the start of the tracks. After several dry weeks, we'd had some rain in the days leading up to this and there's quite a bit of water flowing across the ford, and in Silverstream and Powder Creek when we cross those.

We have a quick snack at the bottom of Powder Ridge (9.40am - I think we agreed this was morning tea?) and it's mid-layers off as we start the ascent. I love

Half-Marathoners: Before picture. *pic: Rebecca Armstrong*

Powder Ridge, but boy is it the ridge that keeps on giving!! It's 11.30am by the time we reach the rope section at the top, and we've covered a lot of conversation topics. Not rat jokes this year, though. Countdown (Woolworths) seems to have that under control now.

A half hour stop for lunch at Bacon Knob (the junction of Powder and Long Ridges - and the half way point on this course) sees us somewhat revived for the long stretch along Long Ridge. The Green Hut Track Group have been in here in the last couple of weeks doing track maintenance. And it shows (and it's obvious where they had to stop!) - we make fast progress again. And suddenly there she is - Tramper Number 10 (aka Rebecca) has come down from Pulpit Rock to meet us. It's 12.40pm. Some make a quick ascent of Pulpit, but Rebecca said the magic words 'chips' and 'coffee' - and I'm certainly not hanging about! It's a race to the Green Hut site where Rebecca and her cousin have set up camp - well, the snack bar - and we are quickly tucking in to crisps, chocolate, coffees, and topping up our own water supplies. Huge thanks to Rebecca for doing this again this year - this re-supply is a game-changer and morale booster at this point of the course.

We are sitting and chatting quite happily until someone points out we still have a way to go. And it's 'that' section of the track … brace for mud, people. At 1.45pm we set off from the Green Hut site and 45 mins later we are at the turn-off to the

Half-Marathoners: After picture. *Pic: Rebecca Armstrong*

Swampy Ridge Track. OK, there's no going back once we turn up that track. It starts off harmless enough. A pleasant enough track, good views back towards Pulpit, Long and Powder Ridges. And just when you start to think you have exaggerated the extent of the mud in your head … well, no, you haven't. The full extent of the mud is right there, squelching beneath your feet. And over your boots, and up your legs, and sucking your poles into its muddy little underworld … it must be a good 30 mins section of the track. Well, it takes 30 mins to navigate the muddy section of the track. We discuss solutions. A boardwalk - obviously. A big job to build (but we would offer to help!). Wide flanges on our boots - perhaps a kind of mud version of crampons that you clip on. Mud shoes (like snow shoes, only for mud …), a couple of tea trays, perhaps? Anything to spread the weight over a bigger surface area - seems logical, right? Well how about really spreading the weight? Air mattresses - a semi-portable board walk solution. No, wait, air mattresses looped into a continuous circle - think hamster wheel. Perhaps hard work going up, but think of the fun coming down!!

Well, all this provides some distraction and before we know it, we are above the worst of the mud, back into the glorious views (Blueskin Bay and all the way to Palmerston, over the Silverpeaks and the Rock and Pillars…). And after several false summits, we are back on Swampy. We've got this!! The sun is blazing, it's 4.15pm when we stop for the obligatory photo at the UFO, and it's truly homeward bound now. The feet know the way, the feet and knees have just enough left in them to carry us along the Ridge and down Pineapple. We re-group as we enter the pine forest to cross the finish line as a group of 9, to meet up one more time with Tramper No 10 who has turned up with fried chicken as our reward!! Worth doing 38km for.

Thanks to everyone who was brave enough to sign up for the challenge, for working as a team throughout the day to ensure everyone got around in good humour, and to our support crew for ensuring we had the salt, sugar and hydration for the task!

Helen Emerson, on behalf of: Ross Davies, Michael Davies, Nathan Dawson, Kristy McNeill, Rob Darby, Sharon Bretherton, Joe Bretherton, and Laurence Prattley.

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Thursday Evening speakers and events.

A round-up of the people who have come to talk to us at our Thursday meetings.

Jan 23. One of our newer OTMC members who has joined us from England, Jenny Forrest, shared a couple of her walking endeavours in the UK. She trains kids to walk / camp / navigate around Dartmoor for the Ten Tors event. And she revealed what it's like to walk 100 miles (160km) non stop (in less than 48hours).

30 Jan. Last Winter Rodger Clarkson went on an Intrepid Overland Tour to Southern Africa.
Roger presented a selection of his best photos of the animals and landscapes of this region, including Etosha, Chobe, and Kruger National Parks, Victoria Falls and the dunes of Namibia.

13 Feb. Dr. Jonathan Squire of Otago University (Jono) gave a truly fascinating presentation of the early solar system- how the sun came into being out of

the debris of the first stars (whose explosions formed all the elements), the swirling clouds of dust and gas around it from which the planets slowly precipitated and how all this is the norm throughout the galaxy and not unique to the Solar System – we are not alone!

20 Feb. Joe Bretherton gave a presentation of the trip he led in late August 2024, a 10 night/11 day trip around the North West Circuit of Rakiura. The trip comprised of remote beaches, rugged coastal landscapes, remote huts, fresh fish & paua dinners, a few kiwis (avian type) . . . and plenty of mud!

27 Feb. A fine talk by Murray Hyslop, we learned of the precarious runway at Lukla, the enormous weights that sherpas will carry with straps around their heads and the ponderous sustainable pace when walking above 4000m. Murray had some fabulous pictures of the soaring peaks, Nepalese way of life and life in the tea-houses that are the lifeblood of the Himalayan trekker. At the close Murray revealed his prime motivation for the trip – to visit site of the 1979 loss of his brother Ken while attempting the summit of the terrifying Ama Dablam.

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

Brewster Glacier at Dusk. *Pic: Nathan Dawson*