Bulletin Number 853, April 2026

OTMC Bulletin

Newsletter of the Otago Tramping and Mountaineering Club (Inc.)

Christmas Creek/Mt Misery —28 February 2026
(photo Rob Seeley)

Upcoming Trips

April	**3-6 (Easter)** Wilkin-Gillespie Pass-Young Circuit
	11 Painted Forest via Jubilee Hut (Silver Peaks)
	12 Wild Dunedin Sutton Salt Lake (Middlemarch)
May	**2** Lake Whare Circuit (Silverstream)
	3 Hermits Cave (Silver Peaks)

A word from our Membership Secretary

When I first took on the role of Membership Secretary I had never had anything to do with a database ever. I had a good teacher in Debbie Pettinger, who had held the role before. She helped me to get it up and running on our computer and she undertook to be there for back up advice. This probably seems very backward of me to have not had any relevant experience, but I have never had to use a computer in my job and I only use the computer at home to write emails and type up notes from meetings. A database seemed very scary, especially when the end of the Financial Year came around and all the information disappears for a minute or two and refreshes itself. OMG!

Apart from that, the Membership Secretary keeps the contact details of all the current members which is copied from their membership form onto the database. At Committee meetings, that are on the first Monday of the month, new members are nominated and approved and are notified to the committee, so that they can be added to the Bulletin email list. Resigned members also are notified so that they can be taken off that list, labelled “Inactive”.

The 1st July is the start of the new Financial Year and I make a note of who has paid their membership fees and then send out emails to the other members as a reminder to pay. It may not always be the case, but at the moment, members are given from 1st July until 31st October to pay, at which time their names are taken off the database as “Active” and they will not be sent a Bulletin anymore.

New members are sent a Welcome to the OTMC email from me and I add a couple of the latest Bulletins. It is lovely to see the new members, all keen as mustard to get out into the hills.

Boxes of the FMC magazine are sent to our house 4 times a year to distribute to members. As the price of postage has gone up significantly while I have been Membership Secretary, I initially take all the labelled envelopes down to a Thursday night meeting for members to take their own one and everyone is encouraged to deliver magazines to neighbours, people who they may work with, or drive past the address of. Last year the price of postage of an A5 size envelope was $3.60c. it went up to $4.30c on 1st July. Quite a few of our members live outside of Dunedin, so their envelopes have to be posted.

If I know I am going to a certain suburb and I have some envelopes to post, I will hold them back from postage and personally deliver them, within 2 weeks of the magazines arriving at our house. Some members pay an extra $15 to have a printed bulletin, which I also deliver in the same envelope, to save postage. It’s funny that a good number of members of the OTMC live at the top of hills. It’s handy that I’m a tramper.

Tracy Pettinger
Membership Secretary

Improvement to track to Jubilee Hut

Before (photo Helen Emerson)

After many years of needing to negotiate the 'muddy' section of track below Jubilee Hut, the Department of Conservation spent three days in November realigning the track and putting in wooden 'stepping stones'.
This is a huge improvement as can be seen from these before and after photos.

Thank you DoC!

After (photo Rob Seeley)

FMC Love Our Huts Campaign

With over 900 back country huts throughout New Zealand and with DoC's limited funding, each year Federated Mountain Clubs puts out the challenge to groups and individuals over the summer to pick a hut, register their interest and then give the hut some love with a good spring clean. Cleaning involves scrubbing mattresses, cleaning windows, wiping all surfaces, removing rubbish and cleaning the toilet. Huts are an important part of our backcountry experience and it is a super effort that over 600 huts were cleaned by volunteers over this summer.
When you are planning your next summer tramping trip, check the FMC Love Our Huts website to see if there are any huts that you will be visiting/walking past on the list needing a clean and some love. Register your interest and make it happen.
The OTMC registered to clean Jubilee Hut and you can read more about the experience by our club members in this Bulletin.

Trip reports needed—if you've been tramping lately, we'd love to hear from you. Be it a day or weekend trip, please put a few words on paper and let us know where you went. Include a photo or two if possible and send to debspettinger@gmail.com

Trip Reports

Mount Armstrong, Topheavy and Brewster Glacier
17-18 January 2026 By Clare Ridout

Having been advised the tramp was 1,000 vertical metres uphill, I am not sure that we knew how glad we would be to see the end of the downhill on our return! Seven of us headed out on this trip led by Gordon Tocher. We overnighted in Wānaka on the Friday night for a relatively early crossing of the Haast river on Saturday morning. It is a steep old climb for 3 hours or so through the bush. The forest floor was scattered with rata petals at points, and we found a collection of the Māori beech strawberry fungus – apparently this is edible but we did not know this at the time.

We reached the bushline at 11.30am and followed the ridge up to Brewster Hut (1400m). Relatively clear weather allowed for good views of the surrounding mountains – but the question was, which one was the Blister! The vegetation slowly changed, with beautiful Mount Cook buttercups and celmisia dotting the tussock. Kea circled overhead.

Mark and Phil had headed off to climb Topheavy, while the rest of us had lunch at Brewster Hut, stowed our packs there, rested and waited a while to see what the weather was doing, before we set off for Mount Armstrong. We threaded our way up through the dwindling vegetation until we were on scree and rock, with a few small snow fields. Amazing views from the top at 2174m, to Tititea/ Mt Aspiring and Aoraki / Mt Cook were under cloud. Thanks to Gordon's monocular we also had a view of Phil and Mark summitting Topheavy (2076m).Heading back to the hut was straightforward.

Mt Brewster (photo Clare Ridout)

Time to pitch tents, cook up some food, meet other hut and camp folk and tuck up for a night under the stars. Another peaceful day dawned – a bit more of a breeze, and most of us headed across to the Brewster Glacier. An awe-inspiring place with the rocks smoothed by glacial action, the blue of the water in the glacial lakes and the very white snow on the ice. Then down to the hut to gather our gear, do some stretching under the guidance of our team physio, and then headed down, and down and down…. never thought I would want to be asking people walking up, how much further it was!

What a great trip. Made it back to Dunedin by midnight. Thank you to Gordon for leading and to Phil, Mark, Gabriela, Andrew and Sosuke for great company.

Love our Huts—Jubilee Hut
18-19 October 2025 By Richard Forbes

FMC is in their second year of the Love our Huts initiative where people register to volunteer to give our huts a good spring clean and record any issues which is a great initiative as DoC are short on funds. Rebecca organised and registered us to do a spring clean of Jubilee Hut. This hut was built by DoC in 2007, replacing the original hut built for the Club's 25th Jubilee in 1948 in the Silver Peaks, close to Dunedin.

Ten of us set off under blue skies and got to Semple Road by 9:30 am on Saturday morning. We met a few young guys at the road who were planning to stay in the Hermits Cave that night. Hope they kept dry with the evening rain forecast!

We got to the old Green Hut site (demolished in1987) after an hour for smoko. Then there was a steep track to the tops of Silver Peak (777 m) before down the Devil's Staircase (hard on the knees) and along the creek to Jubilee Hut, arriving about 1:30 pm for lunch. There was a massive amount of pig rooting in the valley and along the track which has destroyed many campsites that had been used in the past for bushcraft trips. There is a very muddy section that needs sorting before the steep track up to the hut. We saw a number of day runners and walkers, but no-one was going to the hut as we had booked it out for the night.

After lunch, the hut clean commenced. All the mattresses were taken out side- and wiped down, all the surfaces inside wiped down, windows cleaned and the toilet was cleaned. The sink drain was unblocked and repaired and the door latch was repaired as well. The only other damage noted were some of the window latches that we were unable to repair. We collected lots of rubbish from under the hut that had fallen through the grate. Overall the hut was in good nick, but why do people carve their name on the dining table? There was a lot of friendly banter and laughs during our three course dinner when it started to rain. According to the hut book, Jubilee Hut is well used by people going for the solitude. Apparently there is a friendly sasquatch nearby.

Wiping down the bunks (photo Richard Forbes)

About to commence cleaning the toilet (photo Helen Emerson)

On Sunday a good walk out up the steep Devil's Staircase (doesn't get any flatter over the years). The vegetation has changed over time with beech trees creeping in from the Painted Forest and the usual gorse, broom and Spanish heather in open areas. We spotted the resident karearea by Pulpit Rock and some pig-hunters (they need to go further towards the hut to keep the numbers down).
We stopped for a hot drink and nibbles at Blueskin Nursery Café and back home. Great to see some young ones from Kaikorai Valley College to keep the average age down.

Richard Forbes for Rebecca Armstrong (leader), Megan Lahood, Helen Emerson, Sharon and Joe Bretherton, Laurence Prattley, Alice Fraser, Gilles Donneau and Janco Horn.

Upper Wilkin—3-8 December 2025
By Gilles Donneau

The originally scheduled trip to the Rees–Dart Track was cancelled because of the weather but Mark found us an alternative that was no less nice. My goal is to leave the country having seen as much of New Zealand as possible, Rees–Dart or not so I was determined to go anyway. Others were less enthusiastic, though — the weather was looking very bad — and in the end there were only four of us.
After a night in Mark's lovely crib, we headed to Makarora. A driver called Daniel took us up the Wilkin River by jet boat and dropped us at Kerin Forks Hut, after promising that he would come back for us in a few days time. From there, we walked along the river — crossing it several times — passing through the peaceful Jumboland where we saw a few whio paddling. We arrived at Top Forks Hut after eight hours of walking. The hut consisted of two dormitory-kitchen-lounge blocks and a woodshed. We had the two buildings to ourselves for the first three nights and then a group of friends arrived to stay in the other block for the last two nights.
On the second day after our arrival, we crossed the forest and took the South Branch Wilkin Track to Waterfall Flat. The path begins in the bush and we had to climb up several streams on the way to reach the alpine area. Once at the flat, it is beautiful. Surrounded by mountains, the river is fed by the waterfalls around it. Unfortunately, once we arrived, we had to head back quickly

because the weather was turning bad. We didn't want to risk the steep streams on the way back in worse conditions. Mark and I just had time to reach the hut, staying relatively dry, and start a fire that efficiently warmed Alice and Jane, who being a little slower walking, arrived at the hut very wet.
On the third day, we crossed the Wilkin River again to climb up to Lake Diana. Once again, we started with a bush walk and ended in a beautiful grassy alpine area. We continued higher, past Lake Diana to Lake Castalia. The latter was so high that there was still snow around it and a few tiny icebergs floating on the water. We didn't swim although I enjoyed building and repairing some cairns. We kept close together on the way back to cross the river safely. We couldn't escape the rain that day.
The fourth day was Sunday — but that's not why we rested. As the forecast had warned us, the weather was awful: terrible winds and constant rain, sometimes stronger, sometimes lighter. Despite the rain, some of us took a quick dip in the river and walked around so as not to get bored. We read the couple of National Geographic magazines that people had kindly left there and kept the fire going with the wood we had cut earlier.
On our last day, we packed our gear and left the hut in the morning to catch our jet boat in the afternoon. After the bad weather, the way back to Kerrin Fors Hut was rougher and concerned we would be late for the jet boat I walked ahead to tell Daniel to wait for us. It turned out that we had not lost much time and that I had taken my job too seriously — to the point of injuring my knee. Not a big deal, though as even if the storm wasn't the best part of the trip, the waterfalls it had created along the track were stunning.

The Wilkin Team (photo Gilles Donneau)

We then had a long drive back to Dunedin so stopped in Cromwell for tea. That very average red curry tasted absolutely amazing to me. Everything is relative.
I still say that the Wilkin Valley was my favourite trip — even though I certainly didn't experience it in the best conditions. Thank you very much, Mark, for the adventure, and thank you Jane and Alice for your company (Mark too!).
Gilles Donneau for Mark Stephenson, Jane Black and Alice Fraser

Dumpbell Lake—21-22 February 2026
By Esther de Lange

Trip Stats: Day 1 ascent 1551m descent 425m, Day 2 ascent 556m descent 1672m The Dumbell Lake trip provided an excellent memory dividend. On Saturday night, gusts of wind played havoc. The tally: One collapsed tent, two people up rescuing their tent repeatedly during the night, one tent with bent poles.

We were meant to be climbing Sisyphus Peak, instead – because of dire weather forecasts, we changed direction and headed to the Lake Ohau area and Mt. Sutton. Once Joe's original trip was abandoned so we chose an "easier option" with seven of us left Dunedin at 8 am on Saturday, and we were walking by noon. It was an unexpectedly beautiful day until late afternoon. We climbed up through Freehold Creek, past tarns and up to the main ridge where we first encountered the gale winds. We continued on our way through spectacular rocky country with amazing views where we ramped up and rocked on down to the Dumbell Lake basin. It was a challenge to find a somewhat sheltered campsite in the tussock landscape, which was only partially achieved. The second challenge was to put the tents up on rocky sandy ground, where pegs kept flying out due to the ferocious winds.
We stood around shivering for a bit cooking tea in a less-than-ideal evening followed by a less-than ideal night. Nobody slept well as tents flapped and attempted to fly. Joe rocked around the clock, as he scurried around the tent, reinforcing and adjusting guy ropes. Meanwhile, the battering winds frayed Esther's guy ropes as they rubbed against the many large rocks that

Leaving Dumbell Lake (photo Joe Bretherton)

held the tent pegs in place. The rope snapped and down came the tent. Esther frantically tried to resurrect her shelter. Micah woke up to admire the night sky and feared for a moment that his tent had flown. With relief he realized that it was just the door blown open. Phil and Giles might have been secure, but their tent bent before the tempest with morning revealing a curvature in the poles. It was a long night.

A sleep-deprived but exhilarated crew rose to a morning of spectacular mountains and blue sky. We climbed up to the saddle overlooking the Ohau ski field and then onto Mt Sutton (2007 m) to feast our gaze on Aoraki/Mt Cook and a glorious 360 degree panorama. The group decided to follow the ridge before dropping to the Ohau ski field. A shortcut cross country walk though high scrub shortened the return to the cars considerably. We were grateful for Micah spotting a way through, using his possum trapping skills. Tom, who was spared the worst of the night-time terrors, gave us the concept of 'memory dividend' on day one. Little did he then know that the rest of the trip would turn out to be so memorable.

The team on Mt Sutton (photo Joe Bretherton)

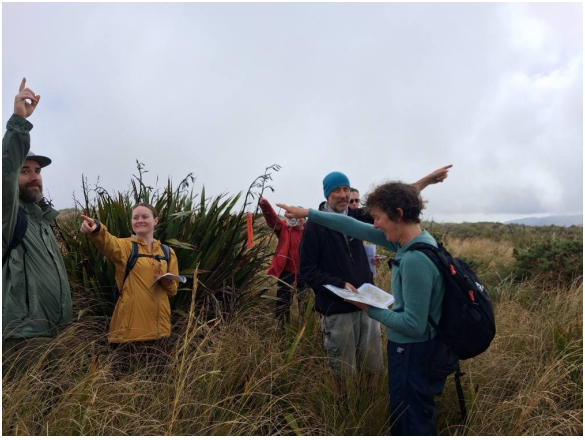
Esther de Lange, Phil Somerville and Micah Clark Prebble for Jo and Sharon Bretherton, Gilles Donneau, and Tom Kirk. With thanks to everyone for an excellent trip, and to Joe for organizing, and to Phil for coming up with plan B, C and D.

Navigation Day—15 February 2026
By Debbie Pettinger

As there is too much information to share with those interested in learning a bit more about map and compass on a day trip, Antony dusted off his Bushcraft navigation talk for 30 people who turned up at the club rooms on Monday night, 9 February. About an hour was spent learning about different types of maps including scale, different norths and what all those lines and features mean on a Topo50 map. Then another hour on learning about what a compass is, how it works and the most important part of how to navigate with it. After all that learning, 20 people managed to navigate their way to the Bull Ring on Sunday, 15 February to put all that theory into practice on Flagstaff. The weather was ideal for navigation as a light mist kept coming and going for most of the morning, giving enough of a view to see a little way before everything disappeared into the white mist—perfect as we are here to use our new-

ly learnt map and compass skills after all.
As there were only three leaders, a fourth was co-opted in and the 20 people were divided into groups of 4-6 people with their first task being to plot a number of coordinates onto a specially drawn map. Once this was completed, the next step was to use the compass to navigate to the first point and find the marker. It was quickly realised that each group had a different set of coordinates and the order of the coordinates meant that there would be some cross country travel between the Pineapple and Fire Break tracks. This was the fun part as the tussock was wet from the mist but as everyone was so intent on following their compass and helping their team mates that no one noticed they were getting wet. Everyone seemed to remember their learning from Monday and understood what they were doing as all the groups managed to find all their markers without too much bother, including the ones in the tussock between the two tracks. It was good to meet up with other groups as they crossed paths and came at the same marker from different directions. The mist lifted enough to get a view of the city and dry out by the time the course was completed and groups headed back to the Bull Ring.

Finding the markers (photo Jade Pettinger)



Where to next? (photo Debbie Pettinger)

It was good to see that everyone came away from the navigation day with more confidence in their map reading skills and a good understanding how to use a compass. Special thanks to Antony Pettinger for all the time and effort that he put into the Monday night presentation. Thank you Antony, Debbie and Jade Pettinger along with Rob Seeley for taking a group on the Sunday and also everyone for bringing their sense of adventure onto a slightly misty Flagstaff.

Christmas Creek—Mt Misery—Mt Lamb
28 February 2026 By Tom Kirk

Trip Leader: Rob Seeley **Participants: 14** **Distance: 19.5 km**
Highest Point: Mt Misery, 714 m **Finish Time: Approximately 6:30 pm**

A Long-Awaited Return
Looking at the weather today, it was an excellent decision by Rob to move his trip to yesterday. It has been many years since the OTMC has had a trip to Christmas Creek – another route into the Silver Peaks from Hindon – and a full 20 years since a club trip headed for Mt Misery. Thanks to Rob Seeley for leading us, and to the two landowners who kindly allowed us access to their land.

Getting There
Setting off from the clubrooms, we met at Lee Stream School and then followed the long and winding road to Hindon and Silverpeak Station. Fourteen of us set off following Christmas Creek, passing Mt John Hut on our right. Along the way we encountered a herd of cattle who decided to run ahead of us along the road – apparently they wanted to lead the trip.

Christmas Creek (photo Antony Pettinger)

Christmas Creek and Beyond
With the longish drive in, Christmas Creek Hut – complete with its tilting front sign reading "The Homestead" – became our first stop and lunch was on the cards. The cattle had followed and were mooing their displeasure at our presence. Another kilometre up the 4WD track we headed down to the creek and found a pig trail to follow, which made for much easier going than anyone had anticipated. There were plenty of big ruts along the way, and we even heard a first oink in the hills before catching a glimpse of the backside of a small pig scampering off.

The Views and the Summit
As we gained height, we were rewarded with fantastic views out across the Silver Peaks, with Karitane visible far in the distance. Rounding another bend, we got our first proper look at Mt Misery, which was looking anything but its

name on a hot summer's day. In the hot weather and with a bit of a slog, around seven of us continued to the summit of Mt Misery at 714 m. On top, Tom jammed his phone through his pack straps to nail a lovely self-timer photo of the group. Where is the OTMC flag when you need it?

Lamb Hill and the Weather Station

Back down from the summit, we followed the 4WD track to Lamb Hill and its weather station. From a distance, comments were made that it looked like a golf ball on a tee, but up close it was more like a soccer ball, complete with patches and stitching. For the record: the electric fence is very much ON – I tested it so you don't have to.

A Great Day Out

We followed the 4WD track back to our starting place, finishing in great weather at around 6:30 pm after covering 19.5 km. Many thanks to the landowners for their generosity, and thanks to Rob for leading – this was a thoroughly enjoyable trip and a great day in the hill

Tom Kirk for Rob Seeley, Kirstin & Peter Bevin, Gilles Donneau, Rodger Clarkson, Clare Ridout, Tim Russell, Mark Black, Antony & Debbie Pettinger, Bridget Sutton Michael Prestnell, Shannon Sealy, Tom Kirk and Rebecca Armstrong.

Lamb Hill weather station (photo Antony Pettinger)