ANUMC Expedition Fund Proposal

Three Valleys, Three Peaks – A Mountaineering Expedition in the Aoraki/ Mount Cook Region, South Island New Zealand, January - February 2009

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1 Introduction

The Mountain Gods have filled our heads with adventurous notions, and we are heading to New Zealand in January 2010 to live those notions out. Glacier travel, pass crossings, summits, huts in wild storms and bivys under the stars are all on the agenda in what we think will be a classic mountaineering expedition. We’ve planned a trip we believe will be challenging and adventurous in its scope, yet relatively safe. We’ve also elected to attempt a series of easy peaks rather than a single difficult route, in order to maximize opportunities to practice our skills.

We propose to climb three peaks in three valleys in the Aoraki/ Mount Cook Region. From Mount Cook Village we will hike two days up the Tasman Valley, at the head of which rises our first goal, Elie de Beaumont. From there we shall cross Graham Saddle into the Franz Josef Glacier Névé, where we shall attempt the Minarets. We’ll then use Newton Pass to cross over into the Fox Glacier Névé, where we attempt Lendenfeld Peak. Next we’ll retrace our route via Franz to the Tasman Valley and hike back out. Finally, we shall find a good pub and raise glasses to our adventure. We plan to allow 12-16 days from start to finish.

The idea for this expedition came about as a result of planning an intensive 10-day mountaineering skills course, which we are undertaking from 12th til the 22nd of January. We had always planned do some peak climbing after the course in order to consolidate the skills. Having worked closely together to plan and prepare for the course, we’ve developed a close-knit team (of four) which we feel would act as an effective core for a ANUMC expedition. With the preparations we have made, and our expectations of the course, we feel confident in our ability to lead others from ANUMC (who have some prior mountaineering experience) on this proposed mountaineering expedition. As such we have two additional places available.

2 Detailed outline of the route

The outline given here is contingent on weather; we expect we may have to forfeit some objectives and spend a while waiting out storms in the huts along route. The time estimates assume good weather, but in the worst case we’ll just wait the weather out in a hut, forfeiting later objectives. At any point we shall have a fairly easy retreat back the way we came along Tasman Valley. And there will be rest days at the huts when needed (or when enforced by the weather). The details given here are only preliminary, and subject to change once we see the area firsthand and receive local advice. However the overall plan is likely to stay as it is.
We shall meet in Mount Cook Village (700m) on 24th January, to make final arrangements for a departure on 25th or 26th. We plan to have done a food/fuel drop at Centennial Hut on Franz Josef (during the aforementioned 10 day course), and will only need to carry in 7 days provisions (allowing a safety margin) to tide us by until we reach Centennial Hut.

**The hike in to the Tasman Saddle Hut (2400m), 2 days:** The hike up Tasman Valley to Tasman Saddle Hut is approximately 28km. We plan to do this over two days to ease into the trip. The first day will be half on an old 4-wheel drive track and half on the lower glacier (18km), leading to De la Beche Hut (1600m, circle in Figure 4), where we will stay. The following day we shall cross the upper Tasman Glacier (10km), finishing at the Tasman Saddle Hut.
Tasman Valley – Elie de Beaumont (3109m, East Peak, Grade 2+), 2 days: We’ll traverse from the hut below Mount Aylmer and access Elie de Beaumont via Anna Glacier. Our attempt on this peak is contingent on Anna Glacier not being too heavily crevassed. The route we will take is 7.31 in Figure 5. If this route is to crevassed we can reach the summit via Mt Walter (2905m, Grade 2- via South ridge or Grade 2 via North East ridge).

Crossing to Centennial Hut (2400m) via Graham Saddle (2635m, Grade 1+), 2 days: We’ll descend the upper Tasman Glacier and stay again at De la Beche Hut below Graham Saddle (indicated in Figure 4), from where we’ll cross over the pass the next day (10km to the hut). Graham Saddle will give us a good view of the Minarets and Mount De la Beche, allowing us to plan our routes of the following days. We’ll stay at Centennial Hut (circled in image below) in the Franz Névé.

The Franz Josef Glacier Valley – The Minarets (3040m, East Peak, Grade 2+), 2 days: The Minarets are accessed via Graham Saddle, so we’ll retrace our route (route 13.3 in Figure 6), bivying if needed. If we have time we’ll also attempt some of the minor peaks in the area for instance De la Beche or Jervois.

Crossing to Pioneer Hut (2380m) via Newton Pass (2492m, Grade 1), 1 day: We should be able to cross this easy pass (Newton Pass in Figure 7) and reach Pioneer Hut in well under a day (6km). The part of the expedition in Fox will be more dependent on weather and remaining time. It is more difficult to cross from Fox to the Tasman Valley (Pioneer Pass, 2759m, grade 2 descent, can be heavily crevassed), so if we enter Fox we’ll might have to retrace our steps if the pass becomes to difficult. This segment of the expedition is then to be thought of as an optional bonus, if time and ice conditions are on our side.
The Fox Glacier Valley – Lendenfeld Peak (3194m, Grade 2), 2 day: From Pioneer Hut we’ll hike either to just under the peak or around Haast Corner, accessing the summit via Marcel Col (Grade 2). The route number is 14.60, Lendenfeld Peak is the unmarked Peak between Marcel Col and Engineer Col (Figure 8). Again, any attempt is contingent on crevasse conditions.

An alternative plan, if funding allows: If we find we have enough funding, we will take a helicopter from Mount Cook Village to Pioneer Hut. We’ll then follow the original plan backwards, passing from Fox to Franz to Tasman, climbing as we go.

3 Expected Budget (expedition only)

- Food and fuel - $220 pp.
- Hut costs (assuming weather delays) - $215 pp.
  - $10/person/night at de la Beche Hut (2 nights)
  - $25/person/night at Tasman Saddle Hut (3 nights)
  - $15/person/night at Centennial Hut (5 nights)
  - $15/person/night at Pioneer Hut (3 nights)
- Additional gear hire $500 for whole group
- (Optional Helicopter - $300 pp.)

With four members currently confirmed, this comes to a total of $2240 (or $3440 with a helicopter flight in). These figures do not include regular flights/insurance/buses.
4 Safety Considerations

Any extended foray into the hills carries risks. The predominant dangers during this expedition fall into four main categories:

- Crevasses – The route we’ve chosen avoids any notoriously bad areas, but crevasses will still be of concern, particularly on the Tasman glacier. Our core will be practiced in glacier travel and crevasse rescue techniques (having just done a course). Our numbers will also mean plenty of assistance in the event of a crevasse fall.

- Avalanches – We will be trained in the use of avalanche transceivers, and will each be carrying one.

- Injury – One of our party, Matt, is an accredited medical professional with wilderness first-aid expertise. Our core members will also have practiced mountain first-aid during the course, and we shall be carrying standard medical supplies.

- Weather – New Zealand mountain weather, as everyone knows, can be fickle. Fortunately our trek in the Tasman will be on the leeward side, and everywhere else Huts will be no more than 2 km distant.

- Retreat – The retreat to civilization will be easy from the middle to lower Tasman valley. Anywhere beyond here, retreat would only be hampered by bad weather preventing pass crossings. We plan to advance to Fox Névé only if we have not been delayed by prolonged bad weather. From Centennial Hut, we need only a one day weather window to reach the safety of the Tasman Valley.

- Navigation – This will only be a problem in poor visibility. In particular, the passes will likely be very difficult to find in a white out. Pass crossings will only be attempted in good visibility.

5 About the Group

The current members of the expedition are the authors, Janosch Hoffmann and Kirill Talanine, as well as Matt Yager and Gabriela Scheufele. We shall all have done a 10 day mountaineering course together just prior to this expedition, and so will be brimming with useful skills and fascinating factoids about alpine adventure.

Janosch and Matt have had prior mountaineering experience, which will be of benefit in the organization and firsthand experience. Janosch has been on two expeditions to Nepal, where he climbed Mera Peak (6476m), Lobuche East (6145m) and Pisang Peak (6091m). As well as an expedition to the Altai Mountains in Mongolia where he climbed Malchin Uul (4039m) and attempted Khuiten Uul (4370m, unsuccessful due to bad weather). He has also done ice climbing and mountaineering in the European Alps. Matt is our most experienced climber, having spent a number of years in Canada, climbing peaks and lots of ice! He is also a nurse, with advanced accreditation in wilderness first aid, which may come in very handy.

We want to use this expedition to practice our skills in a real setting. Working in teams of 2 (or 3 if others join us), we’ll further strengthen the bonds of our team. The route we have planned offers plenty of scope for variance, and the constant evaluation and decision making will, we think, do wonders for our leadership skills.

We have been conducting activities aimed at building our ability to work as a team, and efficiently employ the skills needed in alpine climbing. For example, the authors led a mountaineering skills trip
around North Rams Head in Kosi in September, and earlier in the year had been running rope skills practice sessions on Monday nights.

6 Benefit for the Club – An investment in the future

We believe that this trip is a chance to pass the mountaineering chalice on to a new generation coming through ANUMC. As highly active members of the club, we hope to use our experiences on this trip to inspire many 2010 trips closer to home: certainly many blue lake ice climbing trips will be lined up once we have the necessary experience to lead such trips.

The authors also have ambitions for expeditions further afield. Just as it’s wise to pitch a tent in your backyard before taking it hiking, we believe an NZ mountaineering expedition involving so wide a range of skills as this one will form a solid foundation for organizing and leading safe and enjoyable trips to more exotic ranges in the coming years.