The Epic is jettisoning itself onto the information superhighway, like MacGyver commando rolling through the saloon doors of social media with an Apple Macintosh under his manly arm, the Epic is going ONLINE in a blog-type-thing, getting its tweet on and it’s face in a book. MacGyver says: “Find the ANUMC blog by typing the following URL into your Internet browser [anumc.wordpress.com]. Follow ANUMC on twitter at [twitter.com/anumcEPIC]"
Welcome to the winter Epic. The name of this newsletter along with its modern cohorts awesome, totally and wicked, is an expression that has jumped the shark. They’ve suffered overuse and dilution and now stand as meek synonyms for ‘good’. Slide your eyes through this edition though, and you’ll sense a mountainous smack of ‘epic’ unpacked and avalanching right down your thirsting retina. Don’t beat around the bush, banish yourself to a high peak, let it take you in. Or if you can’t bear the sight of snow for the contrast it provides to our alps which, at the time of rambling, had more m2 of novelty beanies than skiable terrain, take yourself down the Murray on a kayak, traverse the Overland track, or take to the NZ mountains and crevasses.

The Epic’s been nipped and tucked and plated up extra large with special cheesy sauce. So smooth you can use it for snow, so well laid out it’s like the aftermath of a freeheel pace plant. This is the only really cheesy bit so go forth, it is epic, it is fine.

Lauren & Adam

**LAUREN BARTSCH**

Determined to hang around Canberra for a few more years (apparently it has something to do with finishing a PhD) Lauren decided that the Vice-Presidency of ANUMC would be the perfect way to avoid the afore mentioned PhD. In 2010 Lauren has become completely obsessed with climbing, so you’ll see her at the climbing wall, at the nash or at her second home in Nowra this winter (though...with the recent snow dump, she might be seen around Perisher very soon).

**ADAM SAMUELSON**

Adam is new to Canberra and the ANUMC. He arrived a few months ago to take up the yoke of gainful employ after finishing a BA with philosophy and international security majors. He’s often heard blathering non sequiturs or waxing lyrical on the virtues of the beer can stove. Keep an eye on the calendar for Adam’s upcoming bushwalking trip, or catch him climbing, cycling and skiing over winter.

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**WANT TO BE A ROCKSTAR?**

Me too once but I didn’t have the stomach for such indignities. That’s why I became a famous designer. How did I get my break? I designed the ANUMC logo. Now you can too.*

This is not only a chance to work for someone else for free, which we admit is frowned upon in most developed societies except maybe the ones around Tom’s campsite. This is a chance to point at something and say ‘I did that’ without being charged, criminally. This is your red letter day, if you so choose to use red letters. You can! There are no rules except good sportsmanship, fair play and the ones below:

1. It should include the words ‘ANU Mountaineering club’, probably in that order.

2. The logo will go on everything, t-shirts, beer coolers, headbands, cars, yachts etc

3. It should be monotone so it can be used on different coloured backgrounds

Send your submissions to anumc.epic@gmail.com by Tuesday 31st of August.

*This is pretty much all untrue
THE OVERLAND TRACK
DEAD HORSE GAP
TWO VALLEYS, TWO PEAKS
THEY’RE OUT THERE
MT ROLLESTON EPIC
MORE I SAY, MORE!
EXPEDITION TO NZ
CASUAL CONVERSATIONS
GEAR REVIEW - canvas bushwalking rucksacks
MT AKADAKE in JAPAN
BUSH-WADING IN THE BUDAWANGS
MATING HABITS OF THE GIANT PANDA
WHITSUNDAY WANDERINGS
ALPINE WALKING
BIDGEE KAYAK TRAIL
DEEP WATER SOLOING
The Overland Track is one of the major bushwalking highlights in the Central Highlands of Tasmania, attracting some 8,000 tourists each year. Due to milder and more reliable weather conditions, the track is most sought after in the months from November to April. In order to prevent overcrowding on the track and to reduce environmental damage, the national park officers regulate trekking during the peak season: bushwalkers have to follow the 81-kilometre long track from north (Ronny Creek at Cradle Valley) to south (Cynthia Bay at Lake St. Clair), and each day no more than 36 people are allowed to start the track from Cradle Valley, which is why pre-bookings are necessary when planning this trip during summer.

We were a group of two people – Malba (Chile) and Anneliese (Germany) – who walked the track in early February 2010. We walked from north to south within six days, but added an extra two days for the popular side trip into Pine Valley. The day before we started the track, we arrived with the bus from Launceston at Cradle Mountain – Lake St. Clair National Park, and had just enough time to do an easy half-day walk around Dove Lake, with lovely views across the lake and onto the Cradle Mountain massif. Just as we had made the full Dove Lake Circuit (~2 hrs), all the clouds had vanished and the view towards Cradle Mountain was particularly fine from behind the boat shed at the north-western shore of the lake.

Although the evening of our first arrival had looked really well and promising, Day 1 and Day 2 on the Overland Track were dominated by nasty wet-weather conditions. The first stage from Cradle Valley to Waterfall Valley Hut (10.4 km, ~5 hrs) was wet, windy and foggy, providing us with no views whatsoever and making an ascent to Cradle Mountain (1545 m) utterly pointless. Nevertheless, we soon found ourselves in the right kind of wet-weather mood, in which cute little discoveries were being made along the track (discoveries which are usually neglected by bushwalkers spoiled by fine weather and good views): so we marvelled at the shapes of boulders and wondered whether or not they might be erratic, we found that rocks had very different aspects depending on the type of lichens that flourished on them, stopped and listened patiently to some Black Currawongs, and repeatedly started poking around among the various plants growing along the track, concluding that they must be “some kind of heath”. In the afternoon, after we had pitched our tent at Waterfall Valley Hut, we attempted to climb Barn Bluff, but only made it along the Barn Bluff Cirque, where extreme winds and low clouds made us stop, seek shelter behind a large boulder and enjoy the patchy views down Fury Gorge. In the distance, we could see rising smoke...
from one of the bushfires raging at the western border of the National Park. The night was very windy and very wet! Day 2 was pretty much the same as the day before but easy distance and more or less level ground made for an unchallenging 3-hour walk to Windermere Hut.

Especially the first two days, full of rain and wind, made us appreciate the comfort of open huts at the end of the day. Though perhaps not the most picturesque, most of them were solid and spacious wooden buildings, which slept between 20 and 60 people, and provided room for cooking and sitting down for meals. Outside were campsites with timber platforms for the tents, rain water tanks and composting toilets. Waterfall Valley Hut also had a nice volunteer, Judy, a short-but-strong-legged middle-aged woman who was supervising the hut for two weeks, taking care that things were going the right way. Judy was very forthcoming and helpful, and would only stop talking to you if you stepped outside the hut and closed the door firmly behind you.

It was amazing to see that she did this with every person entering “her hut”, since there were many people around on this rainy day. Though it is difficult to recall what exactly she was talking about during each social encounter, it was pleasant enough and the drizzle of words inside seemed to tune in well with the drizzle of water outside.

Days 3 to 5 saw us through the centre of the Overland Track, and all three of them were excellent days. On Day 3 we continued from Windermere Hut on to Pelion Hut (14.2 km, 6 hrs). Though the morning had still looked miserable enough, the drizzling rain soon stopped and by the time we reached the Pelion Mountains (Mount Pelion West, Mount Oakleigh, Mount Pelion East, Mount Ossa), the sky began to clear up and the sun came out. We enjoyed the emerging views during lunch, comfortably settling among the button grass of Pine Forest Moor, and reading the increasing number of march flies as a good sign. The rest of the walk that day was through dense and high rain forest; the trees we could identify were deciduous beech, myrtle beech, leatherwood, celery pine, fern, pandani and eucalypt.

It was here that we saw several tiger snakes: two of them (which might also have been copperheads) were crawling along the walking track, but they behaved very well and rushed sideways into the bush as soon as they sensed our presence.

On Day 4 we climbed Mount Oakleigh (1386 m) under superb weather conditions (blue sky and warm sun all day long) and, accordingly, enjoyed spectacular views up and down the Overland Track. We got up early (Picture 2 shows Mt Oakleigh from Pelion Hut at around 6.30 in the morning) and began the 500m climb from Pelion Hut, first across a button grass plain, then steeply ascending through tall mossy rain forest until reaching the dense shrub just below the main ridge. Mount Oakleigh is a massive mountain which from the top looks more like a huge plateau spreading out in all directions, making it difficult to speak of one main ridge and one summit (but sure enough there is a highest point). From the southern ridge, the views towards Lake Ayr, Cathedral Mountain and Mount Pelion East are particularly good, while from the western ridge – where huge dolerite spires begin crumbling off the main ridge – one has very fine views towards Mount Pelion West, Barn Bluff and Cradle Mountain. The sight of and ascent to Mount Oakleigh was definitely one of the great highlights on this trip.

On the same day (Day 4) we also continued along the Overland Track, walking from Pelion Hut to Kia Ora Hut, reaching the latter at around 7 p.m. Though tired and exhausted that night, the conversation of one of the park rangers kept us awake and sufficiently entertained. We never got to know his name, but we are certain the name alone could not have captured his appearance, not to mention his lifestyle. Again, just like the volunteer Judy at Waterfall Valley Hut, he was very nice, but cultivated some rare traits and ideas: he had long hair (a bit like a hippie), slept in a waterproof military-style sleeping bag without tent, talked about building a large teepee and a composting toilet on his mother’s property near Hobart, and declared that he did not believe in the ownership of land. Moreover, he had great plans for becoming a multi-skilled person: next up was learning how to repair cars and after that he wanted to become a hairdresser for a while. He also told us where to look for platypuses and echidnas within the park; the latter are supposed to be great lovers of half-rotten tree trunks and are apparently often found digging in them in search of ants or termites.

On Day 5, we followed the Overland Track from Kia Ora Hut to Windy Ridge Hut, with one small but very pleasant side-trip to the Hartnett Falls along the way. The weather continued to be warm (at times even hot) and dry, so that the cool water at the water falls was fully appreciated by us.

Days 6 and 7 were spent on our side-trip to Pine Valley, which was another great highlight of this trip. On Day 6 we got up early, walked from Windy Ridge Hut to Pine Valley Hut (where we left most of our gear), and at around noon began the steep 640-metre climb up to The Acropolis (1471 m). We took the ascent in
steps, not knowing exactly how close we would get to the summit. To be honest, for the most part of the ascent the mountain looked more like the target of adventurous mountaineers (which we were not) and we were constantly prepared to call it a day and climb back down again. But then, step by step we safely ascended the steep slope; good timing and excellent weather conditions seemed to spur us on. Another source of encouragement was the encounter with a group of some six or seven middle-aged women who passed us on their way down from the summit, chattering and laughing non-stop as if returning from a lazy afternoon stroll. At 3 in the afternoon we finally stood on the summit, taking in the truly breathtaking views in all directions (see Pictures 3 & 4). We could already see the end of the Overland Track in the south-east (Lake St. Clair), and to the west we had great views of The Labyrinth (where we would go the next day) and its surrounding peaks. After one hour spent on the summit we descended again, safely reaching Pine Valley Hut at dinner time.

On Day 7 we ascended to The Labyrinth plateau, so called because of its complicated geology, where we could see The Acropolis again (this time from west, not south) but also many other peaks and valleys. The attraction of the Labyrinth lies in its many small glacial lakes and its varied vegetation which includes “ancient pine trees, remnants of old days when all the continents were still joined together in the one supercontinent Gondwana” (all the guides and brochures seem to switch into this awe-inspiring mode when talking about pine trees and Gondwana in Tasmania). Admittedly, it is odd to see those pine trees growing side by side with Tasmanian snow gum, and it appears to be something unique in Australia which is worthwhile mentioning and above all worthwhile preserving. After some pictures and a scarce lunch at Labyrinth Lookout, we returned to Pine Valley Hut. After some more lunch, we packed our things and descended back onto the Overland Track and reached Narcissus Hut at around 6 p.m.

The final stage (Day 8) was along the western shores of Lake St. Claire, from Narcissus Hut in the north all the way to Cynthia Bay in the south (15.8 km, 5 hrs), where the Overland Track ends. Since many bushwalkers tend to finish the Track by taking the ferry across the lake, we somehow assumed that it would not be one of the most interesting and spectacular walks, trusting implicitly that most people knew what they were doing when they skipped the last 16 km along the lake. However, we soon found that most people did not know what they were doing and instead were missing out on a very charming bit of the track; one which was very different from all the other previous stages and one which marked a nice and smooth transition from the alpine and subalpine regions back into the more temperate climate zones of the park. The trail kept close to the lakeshore and led through high rain forest, initially dominated by magnificent myrtle beech trees which later gave way to large eucalypts, wattle trees and ferns. One of the most fascinating (and somewhat unexpected) sights along the track was a huge tiger snake (at least 2 metres long, broad black head, as thick as a fist, black body with some yellow bars around the belly) who silently crawled across the roots and logs of the Tasmanian rain forest. We spotted the snake about 5 metres beside the track – he was thus undisturbed by our presence – and we could follow its movements for some 30 metres by climbing on some logs close to the track. The fact that we had not directly stumbled upon the snake but had simply discovered its presence from a safe distance made us feel less concerned about its venom and allowed us to fully appreciate its size and vitality. Later, just before reaching the visitor’s centre at Cynthia Bay, we came upon another natural inhabitant of the forest: a short-beaked echidna, occupying himself on one side of the trail, sticking his pointy nose into patches of moss and soil and not minding our presence at all (he was so tame it was almost provoking). The following day, a Tassielink bus took us back to Hobart, from where we travelled back to Canberra.
The trip began with 4 of us (including several beginners) starting out from Dead Horse Gap on Friday afternoon, and spending the night at Cascade Hut. On Sunday, after a rather late start we headed for Tin Mine Huts. Near the end of this section towards Tin Mine we dropped packs in order for 3 of us to bush-bash towards the falls. The fire-trail which should have led most of the way there had clearly not been maintained, and turned into brumby tracks after about 10 metres! Nonetheless we were able to navigate successfully to the river, and followed it on a nearby ridge towards where we expected to find the falls. However the scrub was extremely thick and so rather than risk having to bush-bash back in the dark, we stopped at some nice rocky cascades in the river rather than attempting to reach the falls.

Upon returning to the track we then headed to our camp by the Tin Mine Huts. When we arrived we met up with the 5th member of our party, Adrian, who had hiked all the way from The Pinch in a single day to meet us. In addition, the Illawarra Alpine Club were camped there with cars and equipment, in order to undertake maintenance work on the huts. As it started spitting lightly that evening, they kindly let us use their shelter and warm ourselves by their fire, which were greatly appreciated. They also shared their extensive knowledge of the history of the huts.

The next day 4 of us did a day trip to The Pilot - one member stayed behind due to an injury caused by unfamiliar hiking boots. Making a fairly brisk walk along the fire trail, we then walked through relatively easy scrub to the top of the peak. After an early lunch on the peak we headed back, with a bit of a detour to The Little Pilot. That afternoon our whole party headed onwards along the Ingegoodbee fire trail to make camp closer to our destination.

The final day was quite long, with a relatively easy section along fire trails, followed by a killer descent to The Pinch. This was very slow going, particularly due to knee and ankle injuries in the group. Nonetheless we made it in the end, though by the time we did our car shuffle and drove back to Canberra it was nearly midnight. Overall I would recommend this trip to others, however the trip would probably be more enjoyable starting at The Pinch and finishing at Dead Horse Gap in order to do a big climb at the start rather than a descent at the end.
There’s something about huge piles of ice, rock and snow that attracts people of a certain disposition. These people take pleasure in hauling themselves up hills. They like waking up simply much too early and enjoy the freezing cold of the night. They carry comically big packs, and speak proudly of loads that to anyone else would be plain embarrassing. They think falling into cavernous fissures in the ground is kinda neat. Or at least, they do in retrospect. Gabriela, Sam, Andrew, Matt, Janosch and Kirill are such people.

Last January we headed to New Zealand’s Southern Alps in the name of masochism and mountaineering, a trip made possible by the generosity of the ANUMC in awarding us the Expedition Fund.

There are a few things you should know about the Southern Alps. Firstly, they are totally unlike anything in Australia. From out of the sea, they rear up almost 4000m in barely the distance from Tuggeranong to Belconnen. These peaks are ice-capped all the year round, 23 of then over 3000m high, and are adorned with more than 3000 glaciers or permanent snow fields. Secondly, for almost a century these mountains have been a training and proving ground for alpinists. The low altitude is a blessing, allowing aspiring mountaineers to train on committing, world class terrain, with challenges as easy or as dire as desired. Thirdly, the danger here is real. Avalanche, crevasse, cornice and rock and icefall are ever-present companions, and the weather is fickle, able to change from perfect to life-threatening within a few hours. For those willing to take up the challenge of this place, the rewards are stupendous.

When we arrived in NZ, we could, in aggregate, be described as total beginners. Sam and Matt had had a little bit of experience in the mountains, as had Janosch who joined us before the expedition proper. Gab and I however were green. Under Gabriela’s initiative we made the wise move of participating in a TMC (peak-speak for ‘Technical Mountaineering Course’) run by go-to guide Marty Beare of Aspiring Guides. For details on what we did, check out Gabriela’s article. I will say simply that it was totally wicked.

Having emerged from under Marty’s regime hardened veterans, we moved to our primary purpose. Fox Glacier village is a collection of houses on the west coast, which scrapes an easy existence out of the flocks of tourists who come to see, touch, and fly over the glacier of the same name. The beauty of the place is easy to appreciate: there are few sights like a river of ice carving its way steeply through a sheer-sided, rainforested valley, the trees bursting with red flowers. Boulders the size of houses stand alone and whisper how this river ebbs and flows over hundereds and thousands of years. Once the glacier stretched out all the way to the sea, but now terminates five kilometers back in the valley. At all hours of day and night, a raging grey river issues forth from the maw on its icy face.
The helicopter flight up the glacier to the neve two thousand meters above felt like discovering the lost world. Indeed the Jurassic Park theme music was playing in my head this and many other times. At the top, above the emerald valley walls and precipitous grassy bluffs, beyond the labyrinth of fractured ice, we set down in swirling clouds, about a kilometer away from Pioneer Hut. As it turns out, we were the only group to make it in that day; the weather quickly turned to whiteout and then rain. We split our gear into two loads and made for the hut through the haze. Matt and I were glad to have halved our 45kg pack loads. As soon as the second set of gear and food was at the hut, the rain began. It lasted a few hours, and was the only bad weather in five weeks in New Zealand.

Our goal at Pioneer Hut was to summit the 3000m Lendenfeld Peak, one of mighty Mount Tasman’s generals. After a practice day playing on easier terrain, we set our alarms for 3am and our sights on Lendenfeld’s icy crown. Progress through the night was swift. We were on the slopes beneath the mountain before first light. Now, this late in the season, enough snow has melted that the glaciers break open in a maze of fissures wherever they bend over the underlying terrain. It’s called an icefall, and the one beneath Lendenfeld was a formidable obstacle. Rather than tackle it in the dark, we hugged the mountain’s side, traversing above huge crevasses which fortunately we were too focused to think about. So focused were we, in fact, that we ended up staying too close to the rock, and discovered what Gabriela and Andrew later termed “Death Wall”, a field of hard ice above a bergshrund (the gap between the mountain and the moving glacier). A rather exciting downclimb and traverse from the middle of this beast ensued. Proceeding on up the glacier and over a seriously dodgy snow bridge, we soon reached the beginning of what for us was the technical terrain that would require pitched climbing using ropes and anchors. Three pitches up a steep snow slope brought us to Lendenfeld’s shoulder, and in a further two pitches we reached the summit. Sweet success!

But it was already late. Working as a team of five, we had been very inefficient, and had lost valuable time escaping Death Wall. It was now 1pm; we had been moving for seven hours and needed to get down fast. Our tracks were easy to reverse, but weren’t lacking a few moments of excitement. Nearing the bottom of the steep part of the slope, Matt lost his balance when dismantling an anchor, without his ice tools in his hands. He began sliding downwards, roped to me at my anchor fifty meters below. I was, to put it mildly, relieved when he managed to arrest his fall with his bare hands and crampons; I was spared having to hold a hundred plus meter fall straight on to the anchor (in theory factor two, for you climbers out there). Phew!

Now we were faced with the icefall. Reasoning that our route up was now too dangerous due to afternoon rockfalls, we tried descending into the belly of the beast. But attempt after attempt to navigate the center of the maze ended in exhaustion and
Our real goal here was the Minarets, a pair of 3000m peaks reached by a steep and (at this time of the year) intricate snow slope. Sans Sam (who was wisely resting from the previous day’s misadventure) we again set out well before dawn. We made great time, and were 300 meters up the snow slope when first light lit up the main range summits like shining beacons. Almost three thousand meters below, the Tasman Sea stretched endlessly towards the western horizon. We worked in pairs, Matt and Andrew in one, and Gab and I the other. There were three pitches of roped climbing ahead, before we reached a wide plateau from which the summits rose. The climbing was fast and exhilarating. The first pitch took us through terraces punctuated by caves filled with icicles and short vertical segments, and the last pitch began up a rock slab with an exciting mantle move to attain the snow. Simply brilliant! Shortly we stood on the summit, and it was barely past 9am. Celebrations, photos, three abseils and a long slog to the hut saw us safely back before lunch. The difference between this smooth efficiency and our debacle on Lendenfeld was most satisfying. We’d come a long way. Of course, it was only afterwards that we realized we’d climbed the wrong Minaret...

Two days later we flew out to Fox Village. As per the plan, we immediately hit the pub (with even more efficiency than we had shown on the Minarets). After a couple of days ice climbing on the lower Fox Glacier, it was time to part ways. We had achieved almost everything we hoped we would. We’d learned so much. We had pushed our bodies and minds to new extremes and formed bonds forged from the ancient glacial ice. Truly we were hooked. Marty would have been proud.
As you read this, realize that in three days time, you could be almost anywhere. There is very little that separates you and the most extreme places, except the will to go there. I discovered this in late 2008. Three days earlier I had been loitering in Canberra, unknowingly a muggle. But suddenly I was standing on the top of Mount Ollivier. It was just a pile of rocks in New Zealand’s Mount Cook National Park. But when it’s downhill in every direction, when your eyes reach unhindered towards every horizon, when the pain of the past hours dissolves in concentrated bliss, there is little that does not seem possible.

The mountains are remote and wild, cold and shatteringly beautiful. There is no difficulty finding solitude here. In the middle of the night, you are drawn into the open by the howling wind’s siren song. It’s freezing, and the full moon’s light reveals a black and white landscape of spires and fathomless depths, hidden within a pall of swirling sliver clouds.

The mountains are steep, huge and relentless. If challenge is the coin you seek, then you’ll find wealth beyond imagining. If you want to feel utter exhaustion, physical and mental, to suffer until you cannot distinguish pleasure from pain, then pick up an ice axe and don your crampons. These slopes hold no compassion nor malice; merely consequence. There is no giving up, no stepping off the wall here, no lowering off. Every step up and forward must be reversed. Within these precepts, sixteen never-ending hours crystallize into a single moment of unwavering focus.

The mountains are so alien, yet somehow it is easier to discover humanity here than when surrounded by a thousand, thousand people. You and your companions share every step, every joy and triumph, every frustration. Even without words, you see deeper into them than could normally be possible in the horizontal world. You form a bond not quickly broken or forgotten.

The mountains are a mirror in ice and stone. In these cirques and bowls echo your own fears and desires, your strengths and weaknesses. There can be no self-deception when faced by the cold reality of this place. You are laid bare to yourself, and you return wiser for it. And you will always be drawn back, longing to taste such purest self-discover once more.

These are the mountains. They are beckoning. Go to them. They will remake your world.
Mt Rolleston Epic

Mount Rolleston (2275m)
Otira Slide Route
Arthurs Pass National Park
New Zealand
9 February 2010

Your climbing companion disappearing into a bergschrund is not what you want to see in the mountains. My eyes were seeing but my mind did not want to believe. It was ‘only’ the third potentially serious mishap in a month of mountaineering - enough already!

Mt. Rolleston is a most sought after summit in the Arthurs Pass area. The access is short (few hours walk in), relatively straightforward and the peak itself is impressive. 2275m means very different things in New Zealand than Kosciuszko (2228m) in Australia. There are 3 peaks, 3 glaciers, 4 rocky ridges and typical New Zealand alpine 'weet-bix' rock. Most sane ascents (like ours) follow the ridges and bits of snow/ice rather than blast up the steep faces. We had chosen one of the mountain’s popular northern routes which leads up the Otira Valley track and ascends a snowslope, the Otira Slide. The Slide has a nasty reputation for avalanches - how about that - but not early on a clear morning in February.

We negotiated a very damp, roughish, slow 5km in dark thick fog and experienced a few minor navigational anomalies when the track petered out in boulder fields. Headlamps made minimal difference to distance vision as the mist whitened any possible features. Our progress faltered as we cast about for any sign of a footpad. Thankfully as the sun rose it banished the mist and the way forward became clear. We donned crampons when the rock became too steep and ventured onto the Slide itself. I found myself ahead as Kirill substituted mountain boots for running shoes.

The Slide was halved by a horizontal gap in the snow a few metres wide which was difficult to visualise from below. Climbing up the rocks to the side past this ‘schrund was the safest route and I waited on the upper snowfield in the comfortable lee of a large boulder. I was shouting 'take care', but couldn’t see how close Kirill was to the gap and the sound of rushing meltwater blocked my voice anyway. The prow broke a few metres behind him and the resulting 2 metre fall onto a rock slab was cushioned by the snowslab. As soon as I saw him drop I cramponned back down as fast as safely possible. I was relieved - and very impressed - to see him calmly climbing out of the dark (bottomless?) hole, with no sign of freak out factor, albeit somewhat damp! He estimated he had slid 8 metres down the rock under the snow.

**Hint - climb close together around hazards and discuss roping up.**

We ascended the rest of the slope in the sun, which steepened in its upper reaches to demand concentration on solid (flatfoot) crampon and axe technique. Jackets came off and didn’t go back on for the rest of the day. Reasonable scrambling up steep but well broken rock led us to Rolleston’s Low Peak, with impressive views across the upper Crow Glacier to Middle and High Peaks. We could just make out the red roof of Crow Hut down in the Crow Valley and distantly the Waimakariri River, which flows southeast to Christchurch and the southern ocean.

High Peak seemed ‘just there’ but was actually 500m away. A friend had told me nightmare stories of great difficulties crossing the bergschrund on to the rock of High Peak and had also advised against a traverse over Middle Peak which cliffs out on the other side. We lost a hundred or so metres of height getting down on to the upper Crow Glacier (crampons on again) but it was nice to be on easy angled snow.

Two small crevasses on the steep approach to the summit ridge were carefully ‘end ran’, the ‘schrund was thankfully straightforward (crampons off) and we summited High Peak just
after midday. Clouds had filled in to the west so the hoped for views of the ocean were not possible.

‘Calendar shots’ were attended and we discussed the descent. We were both spurious about descending the Slide in soft conditions, given its northerly aspect, the warm sunny day and our unpleasant experience with the halfway ‘schrund. The lure of completing a round trip was also appealing. We elected to head for the Rome Ridge which we knew had been climbed AND there was a track on it lower down. But first we had to get there!

Rolleston Low Peak’s SE ridge proved to be a nightmare of steep and dangerously loose rock. We seemed to drift right onto the south face as we carefully made our way down, with increasing exposure and were eventually stopped by a 30 metre drop. A weight saving 30 metre rope meant abseiling was not an option and suitable natural anchors were few and far between. We gingerly returned to the ridge proper, crossed it and eventually reached the snowfield we had been aiming for. It had taken us three and half hours to descend 340 metres.

Hint - stay on the ridge and/or bring a longer rope.

We stopped for a proper rest and feed on the snowfield, well back from the cliffs owing to the amount of geological shrapnel littering the area. Serendipitous hill booty presented itself as a ski pole which came in handy on the remaining descent. Crossing the snowfield was easy but finding our way to the lovely grassy flat spot we could see on the Rome Ridge again proved quite tricky, with careful terrain and route assessment, repeated examination of the map and much descending of steep loose slopes.

It was wonderful to be on grass again after so much tricky walking on loose rock. A highlight was meeting a couple of keas who seemed to be just hanging about enjoying the late afternoon light. The Coral Track down (who was Coral?) was VERY steep, losing 600m in about a kilometre and a half which basically finished off my feet. No blisters - just generally sore. Kirill was in better shape perhaps due to his youth and wise use of runners for the approach and final descent. We made it to the road at about 7.30pm, after 13 and a half hours on the go.

However, due to our traverse the car was about 4 kilometres up the highway. I was VERY KEEN for water, having run out an hour ago. The first river on the road was a very frustrating hundred vertical metres below the bridge. It was maddening to see and hear the water rushing past but being unwilling to climb down to it knowing that I would struggle back up. A large friendly church family from the West Coast squeezed me into their van and dropped me at the car. I pulled over and guzzled about a litre of stream water on my back to Kirill. Our friends had dinner waiting at the 80 year old stone chalet in Arthurs Pass.
Like holidays, successful mountaineering trips just whet your appetite! Here is a selection of future mountaineering ambitions that I’m nursing after the recent awesome expedition:

**Mt Sefton (3151 metres)**

Towering impressively over Mt Cook village with an extremely technical-looking face, I thought Mt Sefton would be out of my reach, but there’s a Grade 2+ route up the West Ridge which you reach from the Copland river. With a start close to sea level, a good approach march up the Copland (with bonus hot springs at Welcome Flat!), a bivvy on Welcome Pass and a relatively straightforward (according to the guidebook!) final 500 metre ascent up the ridge, this is a more traditional style of mountaineering trip.

**Mt Murchison (2408 metres)**

Tucked away in a corner is the highest peak in Arthurs Pass National Park, Mt Murchison has a great base camp in the shape of the cosy Barker Hut. The White Glacier route (grade 1+) offers a cool glacier traverse and a final ascent up a short couloir, possibly dodging the odd rock or wet snow avalanche! As a further incentive, there are a host of other peaks with routes in the grade 1-3 range that are accessible as day trips from the hut.

**Mt Aspiring (3033 metres)**

This seductive Matterhorn-like peak has sent a number of club mountaineering teams packing over the last few years. Even taking the easy option of a helicopter flight to Bevan Col and using Colin Todd Hut as a base still leaves you with 1200 vertical metres to reach the summit via the North West Ridge. For those purists who eschew the assistance of choppers, in the same park is Mt Barff (2245 metres), which requires a 15 km walk in and 700 metre ascent just to reach the base camp at Liverpool Bivvy, followed by a Grade 2 climbing delicately picking your way around the gendarmes. Rest assured, this peak is much more attractive than its name!

**The Minarets (3030 metres)**

Since I had to stay in the hut nursing a sore shoulder while the others had a great time climbing the Minarets, this one is still on my ticklist!

**Mt Kenya (5199 metres)**

And here’s something more exotic! Mt Kenya is the second highest mountain in Africa, and has several summits. The highest two, Batian and Nelion (5199 and 5188 metres), can be reached via the Normal Route on Nelion, which was first climbed in 1929 by Shipton and Harris. This route has Alpine grade IV; in the Ewbank grading system, the hardest pitch is about a 13, with most of the route (around 20 pitches), being easier. An approach via the Chogoria Route means you run the whole gamut from upland forest to alpine meadows to bare rock with possibly some ice and snow.

**More I say, more!**

SAM MARGERISON
'We all need to take along bivvy bags since we gonna bivvy all the time!'

Number of nights spent in a bivvy bag: 1

Expedition to NZ

GABRIELA SCHEUFELE

For quite a while I had that idea to go and climb some 'icy cones'. However, two crucial things were missing: a set of solid skills and some climbing buddies volunteering to take along a dummy with a non-existing skills base. So the idea of organizing a technical mountaineering course was born. A large and generally interested crowd boiled down to four committing participants: Matt, Janosh, Mat and I. We signed up for a 10-day private instruction course with Marty Beare from Aspiring Guides. We spent 8 days in the mountains (Tasman Saddle Hut) of which 6 and 1/2 were sunny. We practised how to avoid falling in a crevasse (glacier travel), jumped and pushed people over a snow covered cliff edge pretending it was a crevasse (crevasse rescue), learned to trust doggy snow and ice anchors (anchor systems), went for tea to a hut close by in a complete whiteout (navigation skills), conquered a rock buttress in plastic boots (mountaineering style rock-climbing), tried to scramble up walls in the glacier debris (ice-climbing), practised to avoid punching wholes into pants (cramponing), tried to find solution to get out of seemingly desperate rope arrangements (escape systems), flirted (some of us) with the ladies in Fox village (radio management), and last but not least, got an idea of the concept of kiwi? efficiency while climbing real mountains (team work & management skills) – which I am sure Marty thought we would never understand...

All in all it was fantastic! Exciting experiences, great guide, beautiful weather, plenty of tasty food, a lot of fun, and best company! Since we survived the subsequent expedition it seems we actually learnt something...
Team of four adventurous and eager mountaineers standing in a filled crevasse (about one meter wide) on the main wall leading towards the Minaretts. Andrew, while passing Gab who is about to second Kirill: ‘Hey, where did Kirill start climbing out of here?’

Gab standing ten centimetres behind Andrew: ‘Ah, Andrew, I was just about to...’

Being cut off by Andrew: ‘Was it here?’

Gab: ‘Ah, yes, but as I said I was just about to start climbing. Kirill is...’

Being cut off by Andrew: ‘Looks like a good start. I gonna climb here as well.’

While Andrew is about to starting the climb standing now five centimetres in front of Gab, Gab: ‘Eh, I am already on belay and Kirill is waiting for me. So would you mind?’

Andrew to Matt: ‘Climbing’. Matt: ‘On belay’.

Gab: ‘Ok, ah, would you mind to at least not crossing our rope so I can start climbing shortly after you?’

Andrew while crossing Gab’s rope (thinking): ‘This is kind of tricky. I have to focus.’

Gab (talking to herself): ‘Is he ignoring me?’

Gab to Andrew: ‘Hey Andrew, please, would you mind stepping back over the rope as soon as you feel stable?’

Andrew (thinking): ‘I really like the serenity’

Gab to Matt: ‘Hey Matt, is he IGNORING me? How rude!’

Matt looking at Gab...

Gab: ‘Andrew, please step over the rope!’

Andrew (thinking): ‘Tricky part is over. Now it is a piece of cake.’

Gab: ‘Andrew, STEP OVER THE F*CKING ROPE!’

Kirill (impatient): ‘Gab, where are you?’

Gab: ‘ANDREW IS IN MY F*CKING WAY!’

Andrew, while approaching the belay station (thinking): ‘What a nice climb.’

Gab while passing Andrew after having to wait for felt three hours and finally being able to continue climbing (thinking): ‘How rude. He was just ignoring me. How dare he!’

Loudly to Andrew: ‘Andrew, did you hear me TALKING to YOU? Because if you did I have to think you are an Arrogant Bastard!’

Andrew (thinking): ‘Hah? What is going on here? I did not hear anything - just focused on the tricky climb. And who is that annoyed person shouting at me and why?’

A few days later: Kirill: ‘So guys, what were your best moments of the trip?’

Andrew: ‘My best moment was definitely when Gab was calling me an arrogant bastard 100 meters below the summit of the Minaretts!’

Gab and Andrew have continued to be friends...

*Incident told from Gab’s perspective. Andrew’s perspective may be different.
Gear Review Canvas Bushwalking Rucksacks

TOM GLEESON
ANUMC PRESIDENT & BUSHWALKING OFFICER

People often ask me for advice on new gear, whether it be a new rucksack, a new tent, or a new pair of Dunlop Volleys. For some time now I’ve been meaning to collect my thoughts and put them together in a short review of what’s available in the local shops. In this review, I’ve focussed my attention upon rucksacks which satisfy the following criteria:

1. Materials
Must be made of hard-wearing canvas. The Australian bush is tough, and you’ll never make it out of Kanangra alive with a cheap nylon pack. Canvas will last you a very long time, hence the reason why the top outdoor companies still use it as their first preference on the top line mountaineering and bushwalking rucksacks.

2. Comfort
Must be comfortable - essentially this means that the pack must have a decent harness because this is where the load is carried most efficiently.

3. Design
Must be single compartment. Reason: a dual compartment rucksack is like an old 1980s sports car with a sunroof. It looks trendy at the time, but eventually it leaks, letting in rain and mud, has more pieces which can break, and is more often than not left unused anyway (in the case of the rucksack, because you are using a pack liner inside).

4. Functionality
Must be suitable for multiple uses. Explanation - you want to purchase a rucksack which can handle lots of different adventures. Bushwalking of course is the primary application, but during the appropriate seasons you will also be using this pack for multi-day canyons and backcountry ski touring. Therefore the pack needs to be tough enough for south-west Tasmania’s scrub, light enough for those big canyoning trips, and narrow enough to allow adequate arm swing when cross-country skiing. A very good rucksack also comes with enough (but not too many) gear loops, compression straps, and elastic cordings for securing tent poles, skis, snow shovels, and rope.

For this review, I’ve selected five of the best canvas rucksacks available at the local shops. I’ve compiled the basic stats for each pack, and made a comment about each, before giving a final recommendation.

Jagungal
(Wilderness Equipment)
The name of this rucksack comes from the holy shrine of cross-country skiing, Mount Jagungal, otherwise known as The Big J. It is a mighty mountain in Kosciuszko National Park, and there is no peak higher than its summit anywhere north of it in Australia. The rucksack itself is an outstanding example of Australian design. I am particularly impressed with this pack because of it is truly a multi-use pack. Its canvas construction makes it tough for bushwalking, the narrow profile is good for canyoning and skiing, the many racking options give the ability to easily carry skis, a snow shovel, attach spare canyoning equipment like carabiners and descenders, and the weight is quite acceptable.

Overview:
Single-compartment, canvas bag with roll-down throat. Detachable top cover. Full alpine racking and gusseted back pocket.
Bag Fabric: High-density 250g corespun canvas.
Reinforcing Layers: 600d nylon Kodra, PU coated.
Available in three sizes: S (43L; 2.3 kg), M (45L; 2.45 kg), L (48L; 2.6 kg)
RRP $369 - call Sea to Summit for more info: (08) 9221 6617.

Stiletto
(One Planet)
I have not had a chance to use this particular pack but I have been very impressed with a smaller version (Vertex 38L) which I have used extensively for bushwalking and canyoning. There is no doubt that One Planet make some incredibly tough packs and they concentrate a lot on the quality of the harness, resulting in a very comfortable load carrying ability. The Stiletto looks AMAZING and should definitely be on your wish list.

Overview:
Single-compartment, with expandable lid, with top and underlid pockets
Fabric: waterock canvas
Side pockets for tent poles, skis, snow stakes
Elastic cord on front for snow shovel
Twin ice axe loops for mountaineering tools or walking/skiing poles
Available in four sizes: Womens-short (60L), Womens-medium (65L), Universal-medium (65L), Universal-long (70L)
Weight: 2.7 kg (Universal-medium)
Made in Australia!!
RRP $459 (from 1 June 2010) - call One Planet for more info: (03) 9311 5244
Pursuit Classic
(Macpac)
This rucksack is one of the most popular among alpine guides in New Zealand and its big brother, the Ascent XPD, is well favoured by Himalayan Sherpas. What I particularly like about this single compartment canvas rucksack is its narrow profile, full alpine racking capability, and lightweight construction, with a very comfortable harness. I have been using the Pursuit Classic for a couple of years now and have been very happy to have it on multi-day canyons in Kanangra, bushwalks in the Blue Mountains, the Budawangs and south-west Tasmania, and on multi-day cross country ski tours in the Snowy Mountains, just to name a few of the places it has been. If you are considering a new rucksack, then the Pursuit Classic ought to be high on your list, and the price is fairly reasonable too at $297 (often a little cheaper in the sales).

Overview:
Single-compartment with pocket in lid Canvas/polyester blend (very strong and comparatively lightweight), reinforced base Side pockets for tent poles, skis, snow stakes Elastic cord on front panel for snow shovel storage Gear loops for full alpine racking and reinforced loop for pack hauling/lowering Available in three sizes : W2 (50L; 1.75 kg), S2 (50L; 1.75 kg), S3 (55L; 1.85 kg) RRP $297 - call Macpac Canberra for more info : (02) 6257 7011

Bluegum
(Summit Gear)
Summit Gear is a small Australian company in the Blue Mountains, with their main store in Katoomba. They have been making excellent quality canvas packs for a number of years now, and you can find a few examples of their work in the ANUMC gear store. The Blue Gum is a classic single-compartment bushwalking rucksack, perfect for relentless scrub-bashing due to its heavy-weight canvas construction. The harness is a little simpler than the other rucksacks in this review, but then again the Blue Gum is also one of the lightest rucksacks in this group, at just 1.8 kg. This pack is definitely worth a look at, and is one

Overview:
Single-compartment, top loading canvas rucksack Zippered top pocket and zippered front pocket Side pockets for tent poles, water bottles Available in three sizes : Small (65L), Medium (70L), Large (75L), all approx. 2.6 kg RRP $289 - call Summit Gear for more info : (02) 4782 3018

Flyte
(Mont)
Mont is a local Canberra company with a shopfront in Fyshwick. They make some excellent bushwalking packs, but most of them tend to be large capacity dual compartment rucksacks. For the purposes of this review however, they have a very nice looking single-compartment top loading canvas rucksack called the Flyte. Overall, a very nice looking pack from a very reputable local company. You can usually pick these packs up at a good discount at the annual Easter sale.

Overview:
Single-compartment, top loading canvas rucksack Zippered top pocket and zippered front pocket Side pockets for tent poles, water bottles Available in two sizes : 50L, 55L (both approx. 2.6 kg)
RRP $289 - call Mont for more info : (02) 6162 1661

Tom’s Recommendation
So, which one do I recommend? It’s not easy to say, because everyone is different and you ought to try on each pack before making a final decision. When you do so, fill your current pack with all the gear you would take on a 3 day winter bushwalk and take that into the store. Unload your gear and pack it into the rucksack you wish to try, then get the staff to fit the pack correctly to your back length. In the meantime I’m sticking with my Macpac PURSUIT CLASSIC because it’s a great pack for tackling the variety of trips which I like to do. Hypothetically though, if forced to choose another rucksack, I would be very keen to have a good look at the One Planet STILETTO.

Happy walking,
Tom
In early March this year I attempted to summit Mt Akadake, a 2899 metre peak in the Yatsugatake Mountain Range in the Southern Japanese Alps. The Yatsugatake Mountain Range consists of eight peaks, of which Akadake, which means red mountain, is the highest.

There are hundreds of mountains all over Japan – indeed there is even a famous book listing Japan’s top 100 mountains over 1500 metres. These mountains are divided into three main ranges – the Northern Alps – where the serious winter mountaineering takes place (Australian skiers may know Mt Hotaka and Mt Norikura from the Northern Alps); the Central Alps (Mt Utsugi is a particularly challenging mountain on this range); and the Southern Alps (for example, Mt Kita).

The Yatsugatake Mountain Range is easily accessible and offers a number of great climbs for both beginners and highly advanced mountaineers. In winter, the main access point into the Yatsugatake Mountains is the Akadake Kosen Mountain Hut. It only takes two hours to hike up from the trailhead to the hut and people use the hut as a launch pad to embark on mountaineering, ice climbing and cross country skiing trips. Akadake is often used as a training ground for beginners to develop their mountaineering skills. To the left of Akadake is a huge pyramid-shaped crag that offers excellent training for the harsh conditions of Himalayan climbing. Expeditions planning on going to the Himalayas hone their skills in winter, rock climbing on the crag enduring very strong winds and freezing conditions. Only a few hours hike up from the Akadake Kosen Mountain Hut is a waterfall that offers excellent ice climbing in winter. There is also an artificial ice wall next to the hut that is free to climb on. Hut employees climb on the wall in their down time and are happy to belay and offer ice climbing advice.

As I had never done any mountaineering before, let alone in Japan, I hired a guide. I settled on a small husband and wife-run guide company called Hopping Japan. The wife, Tomoko Sasaki, is a ski instructor, antique shop owner and tour operator and speaks great English. Her husband, Tsuyoshi, would be my guide and is a very experienced climber who knows the Yatsugatake area extremely well. He is registered with the Japan Mountain Guides Association and is a member of Japan’s mountain rescue team. Apart from providing great service at the cheapest price I could find, they were also a really nice couple.

I met Tsuyoshi and Tomoko at the Minoto lower gate car park and we drove up a rutted narrow mountain road to the end of the road. The plan was that Tomoko would join Tsuyoshi and I on the hike to Akadake Kosen Mountain Hut and would act as interpreter. On the second day, Tsuyoshi and I would climb the mountain and Tomoko would wait for us at the Hut.

The hike up to the Akadake Kosen Mountain Hut was beautiful. We followed a river up a valley set in old growth forest. Our view was framed by a line of magnificent peaks, the foremost of which looked like Matterhorn. Tsuyoshi took us on a short cut up a frozen stream that looked like a winter wonderland.

We arrived at the mountain hut in time for lunch. Some ‘hut’. By Australian standards it was a resort – a beautiful wooden building full of nooks and crannies with bedrooms everywhere, a dining room and a large kitchen. The Hut prided itself on serving the best food of any of the winter mountain huts in Japan. They did this by carrying up fresh supplies on a daily basis. The other mountain huts in Japan had to rely on helicopters only and so didn’t have the same access to fresh supplies. The only drawback was that there was no running water to the hut in winter.

After lunch we hit a nearby slope and Tsuyoshi taught me the basics of snow climbing. After that we spent the rest of the afternoon ice climbing. Dinner was great. I couldn’t believe that they could prepare meals like that so far from
civilisation. The weather report that night looked grim. It was forecasting high afternoon winds and snow for the following day. We arranged to leave at 5 am to beat the wind.

I woke up the next morning to the sound of rain and the end of my summit hopes. Tsuyoshi said that in the 25 years he has been climbing in the Yatsugatake Mountains, he had never seen rain in March. This was a first time experience I would have been happier to do without. Tsuyoshi explained that as the snow on the slopes was still soft, the rain would create very dangerous climbing conditions with a high risk of slab avalanches. There was one valley in particular that Tsuyoshi was worried about traversing. There was nothing for it but to break out our wet weather gear and descend.

In all, I had a great experience hiking and climbing in Japan. It was great to see the little things that are done differently and also the things that are the same. Tsuyoshi and I had some great conversations about gear and he even took me to his favourite gear shop after the climb so that I could make the most of Japan’s super cheap prices (half Australia’s prices). One interesting thing though - I was struck by the number of old climbers I encountered. Apparently in the last 10 years or so mountain climbing has lost much of its popularity in Japan. Young people today aren’t as interested in the outdoors in general let alone something as serious as mountain climbing. The result is that the mountains are generally the preserve of retirees. It was a bizarre experience passing climbing groups of 10 people and finding that everyone was in their 60s. I even passed a group that consisted entirely of old women! They were wearing gortex clothes and gripping ice axes with big smiles on their faces. I hope I am still hitting the outdoors in my twilight years.
We set out from Wog Wog campground early on Saturday morning. It had already been raining for two days, so from the very start we got a taste of walking through wet, dense scrub. We stopped mid-morning to investigate a large rocky outcrop. Here we encountered 3 people on a daytrip, however this was the only time in the whole trip that we met anyone else. We decided to stop for lunch in a bit of an open area, however a quick search around the corner of the track led us to a rocky overhang where we ate. This was just as well, as it started raining while we were eating. That afternoon we trekked towards Corang peak, where our view was obscured by clouds. On the way down from the peak, the track passed the amazing Corang Arch, which is a large rocky bridge across a big hole formed by erosion. We continued to our campsite via Canowie Brook, where the boardwalk across the river disappeared from view in the water. However it was easy enough to find, and was only a taste of things to come. As planned we stayed at the camping caves, which was just as well, since the camp sites were all under at least 10cm of water. We slept well, with only the odd minor interruption from the native mice living in the cave.

The next day we headed across the swampy plains to reach the Corang river. This involved following a track which was reasonably well formed, but had plenty of scrubby branches to claw at us along the way. Upon reaching Corang goon we had a close look at the river, which had turned into a series of swollen rapids. We then turned inland to follow what should have been the last stretch before heading home. However, on the way we encountered Goodsell Creek, which is usually very small. However all the rain had filled it to a raging torrent, at least waist deep, and even holding onto a tree at the edge it was difficult to stand still whilst carrying a full pack. The branches hanging across the river looked extremely dodgy as handholds, so we decided that crossing at this point was far too risky. After spending an hour or so looking for a better crossing point or an alternative route around, we decided that the best course would be to return to our previous night’s campsite.

The trek back was not too difficult, however in the few hours since we
substantially, and sections of the track near the creek were under about a metre of water. Fortunately this wasn’t fast moving so we made it back damp, but still in high spirits. Fortunately we had plenty of food with us, so we were able to whip up an impromptu culinary masterpiece to keep us going through the night. Next day we headed back on our original route via Corang Arch, as the weather finally cleared up. By the end of the trip it was quite sunny, and to show our defiance of the wet weather that had plagued us all weekend, we stopped for a short swim in the last creek before the car.

In the end we made it back a day later than expected, but we had managed to get a message out during the morning to our emergency contact about our delay. The trip home was uneventful, apart from a quick stop to help a poor tortoise that was trying to cross the road.
In our recent visit to the Giant Panda Breeding Research Base in Sichuan Province, China, we observed a variety of habits immediately identifiable with a well-known quizzical, slightly awkward and shy mountain-dwelling creature - by this, of course, we mean the typical ANUMC member, to whom we will refer as “Homo Alpinus”. While the evolutionary descent of the Giant Panda remains largely a mystery to scientists, your correspondent immediately identified Homo Alpinus as the “missing link” in this equation - largely due to the shared tendency to roam randomly through impenetrable scrub, an ability to spend practically all waking hours eating, and immense confusion when dealing with the opposite sex. The latter, of course, should not be taken too negatively, and scientists have enjoyed considerable success when pairs of the species have been brought together in controlled circumstances. In the case of Pandas, the Breeding Research Base near Chengdu has matched numerous couples; for Homo Alpinus, scientists have created a “Mountaineering Club” in order to achieve similar results in captivity.

Through discreet observation of the ANUMC Homo Alpinus population - both in a specially-constructed campus laboratory known as the “gear store”, and in a variety of field locations - we have observed a common life-cycle to the Giant Panda. This may be observed both in the sedentary habits of the older population, who tend to consume more than 10 kilograms of food per day, and in the frisky and playful habits of the juveniles. Both Pandas and Alpinus specimens appear quite content if given plenty of food and some climbing gear to play with. However, the challenge for both is clearly in the mating rituals, which introduce a number of new hurdles. Scientists have observed three issues at work:

1. Both species spend much of their time ranging widely through isolated forests and mountains, and thus have little to no opportunity to observe or easily recognise the opposite sex.
2. While the female of the species engages in vigorous display rituals in a bid to attract mating attention, the male typically ignores this due to a lack of understanding.
3. When the two do finally meet, the need for both to consume such vast quantities of food means that they seldom have the energy to actually consummate any relationship.

The above clearly demonstrates the challenges facing our courageous scientists, who merely wish to see the futile courting gestures of Homo Alpinus finally brought to some kind of union. At the very least this will bring peace of mind to us scientists, who so far have been frustrated at every turn in getting any club members together. To this end, scientists have embarked on a range of bold strategies in order to facilitate the mating process.

Scientists have imitated the successful strategies of Chinese counterparts, whose efforts to get pandas to spend more time together ranged from subtle to direct. At the subtle end of the spectrum, pandas were encouraged to travel “coincidentally” in the same direction. Mountaineering scientists have devised a similar approach, known as the “coincidental car group”. We have observed that based on sufficient “time in car”, the male Homo Alpinus starts to devise crude mating tactics such as a convoluted drop-off pattern, which ensures that the female of the species is the last in the vehicle. Evidence of this has been found in vehicle tracking studies showing a preponderance of obscure loops and circuits of Canberra suburbs, the use of excuses such as “the traffic flows are much better going around the city rather than directly to ANU”, and “oh dear, your pack is at the bottom so I’d better drop you off last.” Effectiveness is mixed: frequently the female Alpinus does not notice the ploy, and thus does not put up her guard against the male’s advances. On the other hand, the ploy is often so subtle that the male Alpinus completely forgets to make his move, leaving both parties single yet again.
Where the “travel” option fails, it is necessary to put both subjects together for a more prolonged period. With pandas, they put in the same general enclosure, and scientists wait for the more senior panda to take action. With *Homo Alpinus*, we have observed senior specimens attempting something similar in the form of the “private trip”, generally proposed to a newer member who has shown an interest in some activity. While the male Alpinus is frequently observed initiating this move, scientists note that the enthusiasm of the female is directly related to the chance the activity involves ropes or knot-tying of any kind. Some successful pairings have been observed from these activities, but final results have been limited to due the mutual exhaustion of the pair involved.

A final option where all else fails is to simply put two pandas in the same cage and not allow them out until there has been success. We feel that cages are inappropriate for mountaineering club members, but a close substitute is available in the form of “tent groups”. This is of course a drastic measure, and rejection is probable unless the *Homo Alpinus* trip leader comes up with a clever excuse (“sorry, this trip requires exactly 11 people and I have precisely allocated tents in order to form a perfect triangle campsite - oh, you are left-over, so you have to share with me”). Where the approach is accepted, there have however been good laboratory results. This is particularly the case during the snow-camping season, where blizzard conditions may force pairs of *Homo Alpinus* to spend all day “trapped” in their tents, “reading Harry Potter”, “playing cards”, or “listening to the ipod”. This may explain why such specimens appear to get very little skiing practice despite the many trips they attend.

The above is only a brief overview of the panda and mountaineering club lifecycle. We now call upon all members to carry out field research, and provide observations to the scientific review panel, a.k.a. club executive and Epic Editors.
April 17 to April 25. An ANUMC trip. Chris Lee, Mark Dabbs and Nic Bendeli

In the beginning there was a dream. The dream was to sample the capuccinos around tropical island paradises and hobnob with the hoipoloi or glitterati on Whitehaven beach. The weather dictated otherwise.

Chris, Mark and I arrived in Shute Harbour to find out that my initial assumptions were incorrect. No, the weather had not yet settled from the monsoon. No, the stingers had not left yet. No, the water was not that warm. No, the snorkelling was not that good. Wrong time of the year. Instead the winds were consistent 20~30 knots, the seas 1~2m and the water murky from the tropical storms. C’est la vie.

We caught the barge to Dugong beach to “get us out there” and camped there for a couple of days whilst getting our bearings after the transposition from busy Canberra to dormant tropical island paradise. We paddled a bit. Walked up to the summit of Whitsunday Peak and generally relaxed.

Eventually we left Whitsunday Island and headed for Hook Island staying a Curlew beach. A great site with plenty of wind keeping most of the mosquitoes and sandflies at bay. The beach was great and Chris was mastering his eskimo rolls.

The next day we paddled past Nara inlet and the treacherous calm SWest tip of Hook. The seas were 1~1.5m and the wind was behind us. It was exciting and Chris in his single kayak outdistanced us by surfing on the waves every so often. We meandered along the coastline, stopping every so often on a beach. Life was good.

That night life was terrible. We were camping on the western side of Hook Island and relatively sheltered from the prevailing winds. The mosquitoes and sandflies understood the wind dynamics well and pursued us with unabated curiosity and hunger. It was a difficult decision whether it was better to suffer the bites and stings of fortune sheltering in the cave during the rain or stay outside and become wet. Mark and I stayed in the tent whilst Chris braved the mosquitoes by rubbing his body with insect repellent and sleeping in his inner sheet for protection. Eventually the night passed and we promptly decamped to return to Curlew Beach and Hook Island wilderness Resort.

The return trip around the SWest promontory of Hook Island was considerably more exciting. This time we were paddling into the wind. The waves were considerably more serious and we battled against them. Chris, in his single kayak was struggling against the wind, whereas Mark and I, in our double kayak were considerably more comfortable. Around the point, Chris went wide preferring the waves. Mark and I spied a calm stretch and headed for it. The calm stretch was a turbid wash preventing the waves from building up and the kayak was seized. Mark and I paddled furiously to escape the trap. Just.

The above lesson was learned and we continued to the fleshpots of Hook Island Wilderness Resort and the lure of capuccinos and vahines. Wrong on both hopes. The resort was mostly deserted and the capuccino machine was broken down. “We can make you an instant coffee?!” At least the accommodation was mosquito free and $50 for the three of us in a four bed dormitory. The
spectacular view from the deck was fantastic.

The holiday was almost over and the weather still too difficult to paddle back to Airlie Beach. The skipper of an 80foot maxi “backpacker” yacht invited us on board for a ride back. It was grand to be on an ex $20million boat sailing in the breeze in style and fun compared to the battling that we endured in the same seas and wind in the kayak. A grand finale to the wanderings.

Now, we are back and the spirit of capuccino discoveries is still aflame. Plans are already in motion for watching the whales and infiltrating a well known resort for that elusive capuccino in Swharzenegger style in Operation HeMan.
It was a bright and early start… for those of us who didn’t sleep through two alarms to score an extra hour’s sleep. Not one, but two bakery stops later and we were at Charlotte’s Pass ready to go. “The Man from Snowy River” was recited as we approached the Snowy River, then “The Man from Ironbark” got us up the other side. We wandered up and over a grassy knoll and stopped by Hedley Tarn before pressing on to Blue Lake for lunch… and a skinny-dip for those that way inclined. The afternoon saw us heading up the steep hill beside Blue Lake (on full stomachs no less), then to Mt Twynam (Australia’s third highest) and finally The Sentinel for some rock scrambling, afternoon tea and Dunlop volleys vs hiking boots/trekking poles banter. We back-tracked a little to collect our packs and see a stunning sunset, set up camp and settled in for a dinner of all sorts of tasty things (Richard’s tortilla bake perhaps the most noteworthy) followed by four types of Lindt chocolate and various types of liquor. Several hours of generally bizarre conversation focused on some pretty random topics – gourds, the art of the ‘winter maneuver’ (ask Richard), college initiations, spooning, kidney stones, penguin suits, discovery that Jess and Courtney had both taught English in the same Polish school and much more that would be best left untold!

We woke next morning to a light frost and had a leisurely start before packing up our wet tents and setting out. Carruther’s Peak was our first stop,
then on to Mt Townsend (Australia’s second highest) for lunch in the fog with views of Club Lake, Lake Albino and Mt Kosciusko along the way. We made our way back down and around to Mt Clarke, checking out the slopes that will be perfect for skiing in the not too distant future, before heath-bashing down to the Snowy River and back up to the cars, powered by the promise of the Bredbo Pizzeria on the way home!

It was a fantastic walk with brilliant scenery, perfect weather and great company of both new and long-term club members. Many thanks to Tom for leading… once he’d gotten out of bed to join us.
I’d always wanted to kayak down the Murrumbidgee River to Wagga, where I was born and bred. In February this year I finally managed it, with the help of my trusty companion Steve Taylor. The seven-day trip starts from Nanangroe Reserve—about 15 km downstream of Burgrinjuck Dam. The trip is one of several ‘canoe and kayak trails’ which the NSW Land and Property Management Authority have put together. Other trails exist for the Hawkesbury-Nepean, the Tumut, and the Macquarie rivers. Details, including maps and guides for each day can be found at: www.lpma.nsw.gov.au/about_recreation/canoe_and_kayak_trails

The kayak trail is well planned out with good paddling distances (around 30-40 km) between each night’s camp, and the camps were usually secluded stock reserves on the river banks. Things to watch out for though are the river flows, which can be seen at www.waterinfo.nsw.gov.au

When Steve and I headed off the flows from Burgrinjuck were dropping off to around 600 megalitres a day. Any less than this would have made things a touch tricky, especially for the heavy sea kayaks which we took. Heaps more (say 2,000 ML a day or more) and it might have gotten tricky manoeuvring a sea kayak through the faster sections on the first day.

The sea kayaks, with their storage compartments were the sensible choice as you needed to carry all your food and camping gear. However, on the first day sea kayaks had their drawbacks. David Boland and Andrew Collins had pointed out that the first day (down to Jugiong) would be a bit tricky with sea kayaks and they weren’t wrong. There seemed to be a small rapid every kilometre, which necessitated hoping out of the kayaks to float them through so the bottoms didn’t get scratched too badly. This made for slow progress—and we got a camera wet (goodbye camera) in all the to-ing and fro-ing at one of these little rapids too.

During day two from Jugiong to Sandy Falls Reserve, the river changed to a more lowland character and the little rapids were fewer. By the third day (to Gundagai) the hills on the riverbanks started to give way to floodplains. The junction with the Tumut was also passed—a cooled, darker, and (because of bigger releases from Blowering Dam) faster flowing river. The overnight at Gundagai was great little surprise, and Steve seemed to know all of its little secrets. We got to slake our thirst at the local pubs, have a feed at the Niagara cafe (an art deco local institution) but sadly missed the opening times for Rusconi’s marble master piece (what’s that you ask?). You have to leave something to go back to.

The trip continued on to Wagga and offered excellent birdlife: sea eagles, wedge-tailed eagles and little eagles soared over our heads and there were a host of other birds to be seen. The river red gum and river sheoak lined banks were great to paddle past, but we were a little disappointed to see quite a number of foxes and a host of carp—huge ones that seemed so nonchalant you could almost pick them up with your hands. There was even the opportunity to jump in and save lambs that had rolled into the water (for which I was christened Saint Paul of Oura).

On arrival in Wagga I felt like we had achieved something special—and I think Steve and I had. Although when my father told me he and some mates had done similar trips from Gundagai to Wagga in the 1950’s in row boats they had made themselves, with no tents, sleeping bags or food (“you just took rabbit traps;” he told me, “and you were guaranteed a feed”) I realised my definition of ‘roughing it’ isn’t that extreme.
Deep Water Soloing

FINTAN THOMPSON

“There’s no way five of us will fit comfortably into that car”, and thus began a Heart of Darkness style journey for five climbers up the Hawkesbury River in Sydney. Deep Water Solo (DWS) climbing is a form of climbing liberated from the constraints of ropes and protection, with ‘belaying’ provided by a deep body of water at the foot of a rock face.

After several hours of cramped driving from Canberra and some great navigation by ex Sydney sider John Tu, the climbing party arrived at the ‘camping site’, a patch of grass beside a road in Berwora, in Sydney’s northwest. The following morning the climbers commandeered a sturdy tinnie from the local marina and navigated upstream to the awaiting crag. The trip took on a piratical theme; George the trip leader became Captain George, “scallywags” were used to describe anyone not in the ANUMC and “avast ye matey” was shouted when the behemoth rock emerged from the morning fog to stun the climbers into silence.

Half shaven and under slept, Captain George attempted the first ascent of Fish Lips (23), unsticking on a difficult mantle and plunging into the murky water below. After he surfaced unscathed, spitting and complaining of mud and dead fish, the crew took to the crag with purpose. Towels were stashed on ledges and chalk bags crammed into pockets as the climbers slowly ascended the crag, pausing only to witness to sickly sweet spectacle of someone else falling unexpectedly.

At a difficult move, named the ‘Groin Buster’ on the Pician Passage (21), Fintan blew a foothold, struck the rock and tumbled awkwardly for several metres, backslapping the water and earning the ‘worst fall of the day’ title accompanied by a host of scratches and bruises. After lunch, Owen the Englishman ascended an unmarked route, dubbed it with a crude English name and yelled “colonials suck” for potential last words as he leapt from an impressive height into a stretch of water with a depth not yet determined. Then Dane took the scene and ascended a crack line up a massive rock. The group held a collective breath as Dane climbed and jammed higher and higher, to finish safely at a staggering height of at least 20 metres where any fall would have meant disaster.

Then the tide reached its lowest point, adding 2 extra metres of fall and a psychological hurdle to each attempt. Climbers had to be dropped off via boat to the new project, The Fishing Line (21), where underclings and deadpoints were required to make even the most modest of gains. With arm strength diminishing, it became increasingly difficult to climb into the tinnie after each fall and the crew decided to call it a day. The trip home to Canberra was only interrupted by a stop at the Sydney Skydiving Centre in Picton to drop Owen off to sleep in the car park overnight for an early morning jump.

DWS is a really unique and fun variation of climbing. The added enjoyment of freefall and free movement creates an amazing type of trip that will hopefully be repeated by the ANUMC.