Welcome to the Autumn edition of EPIC, the ANU Mountaineering Club magazine. We would like to introduce our most recent editor to the team, Fiona Knox. Fiona has recently joined the club and we would like you all to make her welcome.

This exciting edition features a number of trip reports from recent trips including bushwalking, kayaking and the Expedition to New Zealand. If you’re planning to conduct your own expedition to NZ be sure to check out ‘NZ for Dummies’ (pg 20). Intrepid bushwalkers can’t miss the guide to ‘Minimal Impact Bushwalking’ (pg 22) and those looking forward to the snow season, should not miss the Snow Shoeing introduction (pg28). The Research School of Cross Country Skiing has put together a jam packed trip calendar for the upcoming snow season, so check out the trips on pg 13.

As always we’ll be looking for new inclusions to the EPIC, so if you have an idea for a column, have put up a new climbing route, would like to share your favourite back country recipes or have a trip report, be sure to contact us.

So, when you’re off on your next trip, keep in mind sending in a contribution for the next edition of EPIC!

LAUREN BARTSCH

Lauren has recently signed up for 4 more years in Canberra and has fully embraced the Canberran lifestyle- by spending all her earnings on outdoor related gear! In between organising social events for ANUMC, editing the EPIC and going on bushwalking and skiing trips, Lauren finds time to study for her phD/masters degree. You’ll see Lauren about on bushwalks and falling over on skiing trips; just keep an eye out for the hot pink socks...and shirt....and soft shell!

LLOYD WHITE

Lloyd White is a PhD student at the ANU. He is currently researching the geological history of mountain building in the Indian Himalaya. When he’s not off somewhere playing with rocks, he can be found on the soccer field, behind a camera and/or bushwalking.

FIONA KNOX

Fiona has just moved to Canberra this year, and is keen to escape from her medicine degree as much as possible by heading bushwalking, cycling, skiing or any of the club activities. Outside of that she can be found in the lindt chocolate aisles of the local supermarket, or watching House and pretending she’s learning something.
“You missed it!” I said to my colleague when I returned to work, “plagues of marauding wolf spiders, open graves and drought breaking thunder storms...!”

A generous serving of Finnish cinnamon cakes and caffeine was needed to fight off a 5:45 am wake up call on Good Friday. After gathering in Wanniassa and a short break in Cooma, we left a car at Guthega power station and another a short distance from Island bend in the Kosciusko National Park. Kidman’s hut was our destination for day one with the plan to potentially reach Mount Jagungal on day two and return along the ridge line of the Kerries on day four. Kidman’s hut was a well frequented place - the hut book was only half full with the first submission being in 2000. A quick peruse of other entries confirmed that a V.Zukov, well known for his one liner hut book entries, had indeed recently ventured to these parts.

Kidman’s Hut kept watch over a plain of scattered boulders and snow grass which, mind you, made a great camping spot. After pitching the tent I witnessed a great flash of light. I thought my tent buddy (Lauren B) must have an incredible head torch. I wondered if it was her latest acquisition - most likely pink and from Macpac’s Braddon store. I began to doubt myself as low rumbles accompanied by discharges of electricity confirmed that a thunder storm was soon on the way. The firewood we’d collected went from timber dry to sopping wet in a matter of seconds. As we retreated into the confines of the tent, the smell of damp clothing was quickly replaced by the smell of a most delectable meal served by Lauren B of tomatoes, vegetables, salami and couscous.

A 9:30am departure on day two was most pleasurable. Our route ventured northwards from Kidman’s hut passing Brassy Peak and Mailbox hill on our left, over the three Bull peaks, across McAlister’s Saddle and down to a campsite within earshot of a tributary of Doubtful creek.

Whilst everyone’s eyes that day were drawn to the vastness that is the Jagungal Wilderness I couldn’t help looking at all of the wolf spiders - plagues of them - well and truly a scene from the film ‘Arachnophobia’. Their carefully constructed holes dotted the ground below. What seemed to support such an abundance of these tiny joint-legged invertebrates was the added abundance of weird and wonderful insects. Some of them had the most peculiar bodies that made movement most cumbersome. Their continued existence would make the likes of Darwin scratch his head. Jess informed me that studies conducted in the cognitive processing of spatial and temporal information by similar insects had resulted in applications for traffic management and unmanned aircraft.

I had become insects newest fan. The weather that afternoon didn’t favour us and a trip up Mt Jagungal had to be savoured for another day.

The Easter Bunny located us on day three despite the apparent lack of
mobile phone reception. His experience on other ANUMC Easter egg hunts had taught him that chocolate eggs are to be laid out in a small, well defined area. Ours was marked with trekking poles. With praline filling dripping down our faces and every egg accounted for, we departed southwards for Tarn Bluff, Cup and Saucer hill, Mawson’s hut and our next campsite being located just over Kerrie’s Ridge (near Valentine Creek.)

Prior to reaching our lunch spot, Mika noted a trail of bones leading up to a small rocky outcrop. The rocks we soon realised served as a tombstone for the skeletons of four unwilling sheep. If only they had opted for a 900 + goose down outer shell they may not have succumbed to the elements of a harsh Kossie winter. My preferred view was that the sheep had yielded to the sweet aroma of the small red carnivorous plants we kept seeing and had eventually been gobbled up. Oddly enough, I struggled to obtain the group’s consensus in my belief.

Day three ended with a warm meal lit up by a spectacular moon rise over the National Park, views of the Milky Way and the flicker of three candles strategically placed out of the wind.

A descent to Mt Gungartan (2068m) and photos at the trig point was our start to day four. With bribes of fresh tomatoes and harissa on thick pieces of bread, we continued further along the ridge to where (after a short but steep descent) we picked up the Aqueduct track back to Guthega power station.

In Cooma, a few too many pizza slices eaten undid all of the good work, but well and truly hit the spot. With full stomachs and comforted by the thought of no more wolf spiders, open graves and drought breaking thunder storms we made our way back to Canberra. Many thanks to Mika K for running the trip!

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Photos by Rob Hayes

Left: Mt Jagungal
Bottom: Rhonda and Mika cross a creek
Top Right: Lauren in pink
Bottom Right: Carnivorous plant
The dry spring, summer and autumn months provided slim pickings of white-water, so a few of us (Dave, Alex and myself) searched further afield on the Easter long weekend. The only place receiving rain was northern NSW. 200 mm fell in Dorrigo in 24 hours, feeding the Nymboida catchment. This also caused flooding in nearby Bellingen and Coffs Harbour. The downpour came a week too early, so there was an anxious wait to see if the river levels held up… fortunately they did.

We left Canberra at midday on Wednesday afternoon and drove for the 8 hours to Armidale. We spent the night in Armidale, stocked up on food and prepared for the next day’s trip to Nymboida. Unfortunately Alex had to return home, so we were down to two, too small a group to paddle alone. So we thought we’d try to find some other paddlers.

We drove for 2 hours before reaching the Nymboida Canoe Centre, where we thought most paddlers would be based. We talked to the paddlers camped at the centre only to find all the serious kayaking was happening back towards Armidale. We woke early the next morning and drove 1½ hours, where we joined up with Tristan, Al and Popey – a group from Sydney.

Little Murray – Nymboida from Bostobrick to Platypus Flat
The first major rapid was amazing! A 2-3 m drop and some rather confusing water, followed by another 3-4 m drop with a shallow bottom. The first run went. I got flipped in the funny water at the bottom of the first drop and swam to shore before the next drop (phew!). I was hoping I could get down the next drop without having to bail… and somehow nailed the line…it was great to beat a rapid that had me so scared.

Some time later came the “Zoom plume”, a beautiful rock slide that accelerates you as you bump your way down. The rapids kept coming and started to blur together. We had one opportunity to practice unpinning a boat, before reaching the Nymboida River, and as we were running late, we had to hurry to get out before dark. The Nymboida had more volume and less drops… but the challenge was weaving through rocks with the odd drop in between. I was getting tired and was rolling much more than I was earlier. I decided to swim after copping a few too many hits from the rocks. We were grateful when we passed ‘1 km to go’ sign and managed to finish at 6 pm, just as it was getting dark.

The Sydney group we joined planned to spend next day same section of the Nymboida with some new members to the group (Cully, Salty and another Al). We were tired from the previous day and decided to rest and grab some more petrol in Dorrigo.
We met the other group in the afternoon and joined them for the short run between Platypus Flat to Cod Hole.
This section had more water than the previous sections and a few portages, including the infamous “Cauldron”. The next day our group planned to do the Platypus Flat - Cod Hole and Cod Hole – Junction sections. This is usually completed over 2-3 days. We met the Sydney group at Cod Hole. The first major rapid had a nice 2-3 metre drop and a “sticky” hole (recirculating current that traps you and your boat) at the bottom. We kept going, portaging some rapids and running others. There was a lot of traffic on the river so it was easy to get mixed up in other groups. We also had some communication problems. We followed other groups down the rapid as there was never a call to stop. At the last rapid we spotted a hole full of boats. I hit a boat, dead centre, ‘bumping’ him out of the hole, but getting stuck with another boat in the process. We both had to swim, as there was nobody following to give us a ‘bump’.

We stopped for lunch in a lovely spot and then progressed further downstream during the afternoon. We passed a big rock slide that people could use to practice their seal launches (sliding on rock in your boat into the water) and some other challenging rapids. We were finished by about 5 pm and had a great dinner at the Ulong RSL.

We tried out a section of the Nymboida the next day. This turned out to be a grade II – III section. The water was low, but provided a great warm down and a relaxing day. The rest of our group then packed up and returned to Sydney. Meanwhile Dave returned after completing a section of the Little Nymboida and packed out stuff and headed off on Tuesday morning.

Nymboida was a brilliant trip and there is a lot of potential in the area for some really fun and challenging paddling. Easter generally promises decent rain and there are usually enough options for you to find somewhere to paddle.

Left: Dave tacking the white water
Above: A calm spot on the Nymbodia
Below: Arrin on the Little Murray
Despite the forecast for wet and windy conditions, which had already reached Canberra that morning, the team (Christo, Lyn, Steve, Linda, Kat, Caroline, Alana and our fearless leader, Richard) left for the coast anyway. Stopping for coffee in Nimmitabel, dinner in Eden at a place offering 40 types of pizza (did you know baked beans, prawns and corn go well together on a pizza? apparently...), and making a slight detour via the Victorian border, we arrived at our camp at Boyd Tower in good time to set up camp.

The wind was blustery and the tea trees were creaking ominously above our tents that night as we camped in the shadow of Boyd’s Tower - perhaps that howling wasn’t the wind, but the ghosts of that ill-fated whale-hunting entrepreneur?...

It was an ominous start to our adventure, which sought to unite the two towers of the coast – a journey from forbidding Boyd’s Tower, shadowy, angular, almost primordial; thence to traverse seven leagues of wild coast to Green Cape Lighthouse, purposeful, streamlined and bright in the morning sun. For while Boyd’s tower represented an earlier, untamed age, of almost Homeric ventures upon the sea in search of wealth and personal glory, our conclusion at Green Cape tower would recall the arrival of order, the tower’s bright light regulating navigation, and its telegraph station bringing Victorian civilisation and propriety. As we learned during our walk, Ben Boyd was an adventurer who arrived on the south coast in the 1840s, building a town and a rich cattle empire. But unsatisfied and with the obsessive drive of Melville’s Ahab, Boyd built his high tower to watch for whales, and from there he and his indigenous crews would set forth among the mighty pods offshore.

Yet just as Moby Dick is a story of fanaticism and nemesis, the hunt for the whale was Boyd’s ruin; he was soon after declared bankrupt, and fled to the goldfields of California, and then to the Solomon Islands, where he died hunting game. His tower is the legacy; it looms darkly on its spray-scoured cliff top, not out of place in a fantastic epic, a Gothic tale, or the diary of a nineteenth-century Romantic. Just as Romanticism gave rise to the sport of mountaineering, where the quest for the distant summit is the “white whale” to many; so too Ben Boyd’s story exemplifies the values of that movement: the intensity of individual will, the implacability of nature, and early death. But all of this was but a passing thought, as we turned our minds to the walk ahead.

To our pleasant surprise the weather cleared to a brilliant sunny day the following morning, and we were in high spirits as we set off southwards down the trail. Finding the trail well marked and graded, our journey through to lunch was interrupted only by stops for photos and fascinating geological interludes provided by our resident geologist, Kat. Lunch had us perched by a beautiful bay, watching the waves and the four strong and tough, though others might say crazy and foolhardy, members of our group swimming in them.

After lunch it was off to a nearby campground to stock up on a much-needed supply of water. On our way, however, a pleasant surprise (at least to some of us), two fellows were happily grazing from some grasses growing at the beach. This time, no hopping away, but they stayed put as if they knew they were soon going to be famous, with their pictures put on the world wide web. Shortly after, we arrived at the campground where drinking water was promised, a somewhat less pleasant surprise than the kangaroos, but definitely entertaining - the water out of the rain water tank (draining off the roof of the long drop) had a few swimmers in it which caused a bit of a dilemma for the vegetarians in our group.

As the sun was about to set, we arrived at our overnight campsite. After erecting the tents we all got busy preparing gourmet delights and the results were amazing. Particular highlights were Richard’s goat cheese frittata (made from eggs which had impressively survived the 18km walk intact) and Steve’s camp trifle, served in wine glasses! Who said campsite food is boring? It was a clear night and we strolled down to the beach after dinner for a spot of stargazing. The Milky Way streamed overhead and we were able to identify far-off galaxies, one possible planet and learnt how to find south using the Southern Cross.

Left: Boyd’s Tower
After a leisurely start the next morning we donned our packs over tender body parts and set off on the trail again for a shorter stretch of only 12 km. The second leg of our journey proved as picturesque and as full of variety as the first, punctuated throughout with lookouts, cliffs, turquoise waters and ruins of early settlers’ cottages, all providing plenty of photo opportunities. A beautiful secluded beach was the setting for morning tea (although the water was a bit brisk for swimming this time!) before pushing on to the finish at Green Cape. We had a well-deserved if breezy lunch at the foot of Green Cape lighthouse, then pooled our remaining water for cups of tea while Richard and Christo retrieved the car from our start point so we could head home.

After finding one Cooma take away haunt closed (along with its promise of 30+ types of burgers - clearly southern NSW doesn’t hold back on variety!), we settled at another cafe. We were most impressed by the range of souvenirs, which ranged from drivers licence holders emblazoned with skiers in bright retro ski suits, to quality postcards of gorillas in dresses with captions such as ‘How’s your sex life, Darling?’.

We rolled back in to Canberra late that evening. We thought we’d finished, but Ben Boyd, seeker of attention, money and power, was not yet done with us, cursing a car left on campus with yet another flat battery. Unable to start it, this necessitated a note to security ensuring the car wouldn’t be towed away! It must be said, however, that if all a ghost of an old whaler and entrepreneur can do is stop an ancient Ford Escort, while otherwise leaving us with beautiful weather, campsites, scenery, food and company, either this ghost has powers rather weak, or ain’t such a bad bloke after all!

Left: Lunch at the Lighthouse
Below right: Richard’s gourmet creation
Below: Ben Boyd NP
Expedition Report

CHARLES JENKINS
photos by Charles and Sam

I could have gone to Arapiles!"
- Jack

Back in one piece from New Zealand and it was a pretty awe-inspiring place!

The mountain scenery in the Darrans is staggering; the steepest terrain I have ever seen and jagged peaks in all directions.

We had a pretty good trip although, as usual, in New Zealand the weather played a hand. The walk in to the base camp area in the Sabre cirque proved to be a bit of an epic. The early sections were through dense rain forest on a little-used track that hadn’t been cleared of last winters’ windfalls, and it proved very difficult terrain with big packs. Our sherpa (actually the father of one of the expeditioneers, who was helping with the gear carry but not planning to stay long) took ill on this section and we had to get him safely back to the road, redistribute the loads, and generally get reorganised. This meant the trip in took a day longer than we expected, and it did not stop being heavy going for one minute over steep and broken terrain. We finally got established in the spacious rock shelter of Phil’s Bivvy and began sizing up the amazing rock spires around us.

The Sabre itself rises 1000m above the bivvy and is less than a kilometre away. Finding a safe approach to its base took a bit of exploring; an American mountain guide who was just leaving the bivvy warned us that she had found this approach “precarious” and indeed there were almost 500 vertical meters of tussocks, smooth rocks, and waterfalls. Having found a route through this, we grabbed a perfect day to try to get onto the West Ridge of the Sabre. After a lot of very steep and exposed scrambling we made it to the West Col (which is where the above photo was taken). By this stage it was clear that the mountain was a much bigger proposition than we had expected and one look at the West Ridge convinced us that ungraded routes in Kiwi guidebooks are best left alone by mere mortals.
The plan after having sized things up, was to take a look at the East side of the mountain. Having been on the go for six days, and fortified by a good forecast, we took a rest day; only to find on the evening radio schedules that a large weather system had developed, with severe rain warnings suddenly being issued. With many creeks between us and a beer we decided we had better leave while the going was good.

I think I’ll come back and do this when I’m a bit younger
-Guy

So, on the eighth day we headed down the valley for the long slog home. We later heard that a pair of climbers, who had set off to climb the mountain during our rest day, had spent 30 hours on the mountain and just escaped the storm, so we felt we had done the right thing.

All in all, although the weather chased us off before we could probe the mountain’s defences a second time, it was a pretty challenging trip in terms of effort, remoteness, and the sheer scale of the terrain. I think all the participants learned a lot about how to execute a trip of this complexity and difficulty. I’m sure we’ll go back!
The 2009 academic programme for the Research School of Cross-Country Skiing is a full and exciting one. Students will be able to choose from a diverse range of units encompassing all aspects of cross-country skiing, from Beginners’ Lessons, to multi-day backcountry ski tours. There are no prerequisite units of study.

Degree programmes offered by the RSCCS include:

- Bachelor of Nordic Skiing
- Bachelor of Snow Camping
- Master of Telemark Skiing
- PhD in Cross-Country Skiing

UNITS OF STUDY

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For more information contact:
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Grey Mare Hut
Jagungal Wildnerness
Most of us, though we respect and admire our various mentors, are not given to hero-worship. This is a healthy Australian trait encouraged by two things. The first is a belief in equality, the common potential of all our fellow human beings. The second is scepticism, the assurance of idiocy in all our fellow human beings. Pressure brings out both the best and worst in people, and you're never under more pressure than when you're leading a team.

Leading forces us to learn about ourselves. If you don't like to follow, then the first thing you need to ask yourself before taking the lead is this: what kind of a person would you follow into the wild? Do you measure up to your own definition of the ideal leader?

Duncan and Mika conduct the Leadership Weekend with a certain Machiavellian relish. You never quite know if the challenge before you is real, or part of an elaborate test to illustrate a subtle point. Naturally, I and my fellow alums are sworn to secrecy; one of the key aims of the weekend is to teach coping with the unexpected, therefore the exact contents of the course must remain, well, unexpected. Aside from assuring you that we had a great deal of fun, all I can tell you is what we learned and why, not how we learned it (if you want the fun of knowing that, you'll have to take the course).

Before the weekend my personal definition of the ideal leader was broken down into three movie-inspired points:

a) Deep, resounding voice for making dramatic speeches

b) Looks good on a horse or barricade when giving said speeches

c) Points in the right direction when saying ‘it’s this way’ in the speeches

The last point relates to skill, your knowledge of basic bushcraft. The fact is, however, that you can delegate tasks that you’re not so hot at, like navigating and first aid, to the team members that are. Leadership is about knowing when and how to do that, rather than doing it all yourself. The first two points relate to looking the part; you must come across like you care and know to win the trust of your troops. A leader’s job is to make a trip safe and fun, not to get praise for being a good leader. If you run it well, then an enjoyable trip is its own reward. I now have three more pragmatic points for defining the good leader.

Confidence: To win the trust of others you must first trust yourself. Of course, we all feel more comfortable in familiar situations, and having basic bushcraft or knowledge of the area makes it easier. But what is it you don’t know? It is because of the unexpected that a leader is needed in the first place. The course taught us one thing very clearly; know what you don’t know. Be aware of the extent of your skills, and of your default leadership style.
Everybody has leadership strengths and weaknesses; as long as you know what yours are, you can work around them. Some of us find it hard to make decisions, while others are too dictatorial. Knowing that both extremes will alienate your team, and knowing which one you tend towards naturally means that you can manage yourself, and therefore those around you, a whole lot better.

Communication: Whereas confidence is all about you, communication is all about your team. It is no good knowing something if you can’t explain it to the people around you, and it is no good being sure of yourself if you can’t give your group that same certainty. Listen to your team; people want to be included in decision-making process, and to have their ideas heard (and chances are they will have good ones worth hearing). Social cohesion is critical to both safety and enjoyment. As a leader you can encourage it by having a one-on-one chat with each person, to learn what his or her expectations are for the trip. Diplomacy and tact become even more critical in times of conflict. You might find that some people bring conflict with them to a trip. As a leader, your role is not to council people through their private problems, but to make sure they don’t endanger the group. In many ways a leader is just a particularly good team player. If you like people, you’re a whole lot closer to being a good leader. If you are shy or reserved but love the outdoors, you may need to work on communication and empathy.

A little extra: Food, socks and charisma. What’s that little extra spark that makes the leader special? It’s an element of surprise. Your pack has hidden depths, so start there. Some especially nice chocolate, a bottle of wine, or other unexpected food source can go a long way to lightening the mood. It is not your responsibility to feed your troops, but you can surprise and inspire them. Likewise, a dry pair of socks or extra set of thermals might really help someone along. It’s not your responsibility to clothe your troops, just to comfort them. Finally, charisma. Yes, you too oh shy wallflower have charisma, like everything mentioned above, you just need to remember it. If you can make direct eye contact with someone while they are talking to you, smile when they are finished, then comment to prove you were actually listening, you’ve just become a whole lot more likable.

Clearly, none of us are born to lead. It is something we learn. A lot will happen on your leadership weekend as you set of to discover your skills. Stories will be told, things will be built, talks will be given, hikes will be taken. The weather may turn nasty, there may be fights, there may even be blood and fire. But a real leader doesn’t need to know in advance. They just need to know themselves.
Mont 24

To some, the thought of a 24 hour mountain bike race is lunacy... Starting at midday Saturday, the goal is to complete as many laps as possible before someone crosses the finish line after midday Sunday. This year's Mont took place on the fast, butter smooth trails of Sparrow Hill. The lack of big climbs/technical riding means average laps are pretty quick, and the course is suitable for riders of all skill levels...

Midday Saturday: The race begins with a 500m dash to the bikes before lap 1. Matt does lap one, then Chris goes out. Later, Chris tags me at transition, and I ride the first firetrail section, my legs feeling iffy as they start to warm up. The firetrail weaves into snaking singletrack amongst the pines. The 'body memory' takes a while to kick in, especially as I've only been riding a roadie for the past few months. The trails are familiar and non technical, and singletrack soon feels natural again. With glee I find myself on 'Ice Dam', passing the "12km to go" sign. Although it feels like I've only been riding for 10 minutes, the lap is nearly half done, damn! At the 2/3rds mark, the trail is wetter and a couple of switchbacks lead up the hillside. The course soon reaches drier trails, a superb end section and the transition tent.

My second lap is before dusk. The trail is holding up well and the 'flow' is back. Somewhere on 'Spaghetti Western' I bomb in behind a nut riding in a pirate outfit. Obviously, one of the "fun" teams, I call track, and pass with an "AAAAARRRRRR" for good measure. Afterwards, there is time to eat, service the bike, and try to snooze before the night laps. In a 24, the internal buzz tends to prevent any decent sleep, though as I lie down, part of the brain wants to roll over and give up now. This I ignore...

Night laps are a different game. The trails feel almost the same, but the visuals are way different. The forest is lit up by a penetrating bright beam. Ahead, red lights flicker ahead, and other beams slide and flicker amongst the trees. The forest is still, the silence broken only by the crunch of tyres, and ever present puffing. I return to camp to rest before a planned double lap during the 2:30-4:30am graveyard shift. My only thought is that I'll be returning to the tent as the sun will be just starting show.

Team members head out and come back throughout th night. My alarm goes off, but I haven't really slept at all. Feeling ok, I grab some food and gels before going out. Towards the end of the first lap, my legs are feeling the pinch and weariness is rising. Despite the cool night air, I'm sweating a lot. The second lap is harder, but I dig out some energy at the end to hammer the finish. At the tent I drop everything, grab some recovery food, and crawl into my sleeping bag. My left hand pulses and aches from hours of hanging on the bars. I'm half woken from a doze when Paul returns. I hear something about falling in a dam but I'm too tired to know what is going on, so I leave the others to handle it and pass out.

My alarm goes off again, I'm tired, sore, and my legs are hammered. The thought of giving up is very appealing now! The others are tired too, and Matt has pulled out due to injury. I go out again, painfully lowering onto the seat. Fortunately my mind and legs warm to the task, rhythm returns, and the aches and pains are forgotten. The demons of the night vanish and I really enjoy the lap. Just one more to go. Two hours later, it's last lap time. The beckons so I've got free reign to hammer it. The first few sections feel slower and harder, but I keep trying to pass as many riders as possible. I have to grind out the uphill sections, passing numerous tired riders...

The adrenalin builds as the anticipation of the fast final section beckons. My mind switches imperceptibly to intense focus. Some rocky stuff is dispensed with and I hammer down a wide turn, spotting someone ahead as they slowing on a small rise. Yelling for track, I crank the pedals madly and whip by. Soon after I hear puffing and a chain whipping on stays. Someone is on my tail but doesn't want to pass, so I try and ride even faster. We pass some riders on the last few turns. The track breaks out onto some firetrail before 'Spaghetti Western'. Several riders dot the firetrail, and with the next singletrack being narrow, I don't want to get stuck behind slower riders.
Rising from the seat, I work the pedals, passing riders and seeing one mere metres from the entry. Calling for track, my legs work even more furiously. Lovetake just in time....

The trail is clear to bomb down. I can’t hear anyone behind and wonder if I’ve lost the other guy. I’m immersed in perfection: awesome trails, high speed, and concentration so intense I’m barely aware of my bike as my mind works it near unconsciously. Bombing in behind another rider, we hook right into an open area and cross a gully. The pines close in again and I pass. The trail breaks into an open gully surrounded by onlookers. I negotiate a rock drop, swish the bars to dodge some saplings, and I’m stuck on the tail of two riders. I call track, and crank furiously to pass as we cross a tiny section of firetrail, and drop down the other side. The trail ahead is clear, perfect! Speed is the main concern and I pedal as hard as I can. Saplings whoosh by either side, and the moment is sheer delight, the speed insane, the tyres gripping amazingly.

A quick mono gets me past a dip and the trail flicks through a gully a few times before breaking out into scabby firetrail - the last uphill section before transition.

My legs have a mind of their own, whirring madly without complaint, trying to extract every last ounce of speed. There is a mad run through timing, and out into transition where I spot Paul and tag him. In a second, the race is over. The furious final minutes are replaced by much puffing as I lean over my bike to recover. The rider tailing me earlier comes over with a grin and extended hand. “That was beautifully led”, he says as we shake hands. I relive the elation of the final moments again. I wish him luck as he heads out again...

The end of the race is a mixture of emotions, being pumped, relief, and a hint of emptiness that the longest day is over. The final lap elation lingers nicely, especially the simple gesture of praise from the other rider. That moment alone makes the race worthwhile. A clean set of clothes later, and all that’s left is packing and the award ceremony. The slow pace is strange after being on the go for 24 hours, but its seeking the thrill that keeps some of us coming back yearafter year. I’ll definitely be back for 2010...

Left: Night Riding
Below: The beginning of the race

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MONT 24 INFORMATION

Get your team ready for the 2010 Mont 24 hour Mountain Biking Race.

The 2010 Mont 24 hour race will be held at Sparrow Hill, Canberra on the 27th-28th of March.

For more information check out www.mont24.com.au
With summer drawing to a close, the kayakers made the most of the warmth and daylight this year with a series of fantastic morning and afternoon lake paddles, plenty of rolling and sailing practice plus a stack of other fun trips.

The Australia Day and Bluies weekends provided great opportunity to head to Penrith where white-water first-timers could get some practice in a safe environment. The club’s brand new creek boats were put through their paces, with all beginners impressed by their stability and manoeuvrability. The ‘funyaks’ (double inflatables) and rafting allowed paddlers of all ability to have a go. Unfortunately, Garrick did provide us all with a timely reminder that if you don’t keep your elbows down, you risk a dislocated shoulder (ouch!).

In March the paddlers took advantage of the full moon to share a feast on Springbank Island and kayak in the dark. Only two days later, the crew braved an early rise to head out for a dawn paddle, watch the balloons set off as part of the Annual Balloon Festival and cook up a pancake storm on the island.

This event brought out much creative flair, with toppings ranging from berries and chocolate through to Smarties. Most couldn’t resist the silly hat theme; Anthony’s upside down colander may have taken the {pan}cake! A weekend trip to Tuross combined with the ANU Sailing Club was a great opportunity to mix a bit of estuary and lake paddling with sailing, windsurfing and bushwalking. A few days later, cold choppy weather wasn’t enough to stop the team paddling over to the Canberra Yacht Club for a top feed.

Now that daylight savings has finished, the afternoon paddles have ceased, but paddling activities will continue right through winter on the lake, down the coast and in the snowmelt.

A rare release of water from Burrinjuck got the rapids flowing at Childowlah recently. This is a nice spot on the Murrumbidgee past Yass, where you can park and play along a couple of hundred metres of grade 2 rapids. Excellent spot for beginners to practice eddy turns and ferry glides, but be ready to roll (or swim) - there’s a couple of tricky chutes.
Gordon Falls to Scenic World:
After a stop at Leura Bakery, around twelve of us started our walk at the top of the escarpment at Gordon Falls. We checked out the views and Leura Cascades before descending around 500m into the valley, stopping part way down for a rest, snack and, for one, a swim at a spectacular set of falls. After reaching the valley floor we stopped for lunch and some of us were lucky enough to see a pair of lyrebirds. We walked the rest of the way along the valley floor, beneath the base of the Three Sisters, to Scenic World, where most of us opted for taking the railway back up to the top, with the exception of two troopers who walked back up...and almost beat the train!

National Pass:
A contingent of ten walkers started the day at the top of Wentworth Falls, greeted with spectacular views from all sides as we made our way down the edge of the escarpment and crossed back over at the base of the falls. We then walked along the National Pass, a ledge running for several kilometres halfway down the cliff, before meeting some more falls and making our way back up to the top, where we had lunch in a mini canyon. A scenic walk around the Nature Track and back along the clifftop from where we had started completed our trip.

Evan’s lookout to Govett’s Leap:
Four of us went for a quick walk in the mist along the top of the cliff, enjoying the views that were blanketed in white, before taking refuge in a Blackheath café...
These "NZ 4 Dummies" hints are based on several hundred man-days of experience in the Southern Alps by the author and his companions, all experienced outdoors people who have commenced the stern but beautiful challenges of these mountains in the last few years.

1. **Weather** This is the biggest single factor in Kiwi climbing. In the Southern Alps, there's nothing between you and the Andes - in either direction. Weather windows are usually short (three days is a long one) and predictability is poor beyond three days too. Bad weather is formidable, and if you have sat out a nor-wester in a tent you can readily understand why many NZ routes are built around "bivvies". Having a few tons of natural shelter over your head can be very comforting, although damp in parts. Huts help here too but are well spaced in many areas.

2. **The approach** Getting to most NZ peaks takes about as long as the weather window. Go figure! Getting there, before you start any climbing, can involve local knowledge about traversing private property, hiring jet boats, or crossing swollen rivers (the biggest single cause of death in the NZ outdoors). You may be able to helicopter in to some popular locations (like Aspiring) but you won't know how to walk out...unless you chopper both ways. Huts may shorten the approach but vary from comfortable to nauseating, and may have recently vanished in an avalanche.

3. **Guidebooks** These are most reasonably explained as a form of dry humour, inherited from the Puritan, self-denying, Scottish ancestry of many Kiwis. The difficulties will be understated, the times underestimated, and the information well out-of-date. Quite a lot of this is a result, to be serious, of objective factors. Most routes have too little traffic for a consensus to emerge or for changes in terrain or tracks to find their way into print. Glacial retreat is faster than any publisher can cope with and has a huge effect in mountains that are glued together with ice more than most.

4. **Variability** The quality of the snow cover is crucial for any white route, but can vary enormously from year to year and even within a season. A glacier traverse can be a joy one year and a scree nightmare the next.

5. **Tactics** There's a simple choice: slow and heavy or light and fast (unless you go the chopper route, in which case you can be fast and heavy). The trick is to judge the weather window. The slow and heavy angle takes the premise that you can't judge the weather but you can carry enough food to sit it out until the good stuff arrives. The fast and light idea says you sit in Wanaka or Franz Josef over the cappucinos until the weather break arrives. Hint: sitting out the bad stuff is either terrifying (in a tent) or wet and draughty (in a bivvy). The Plan B is to get to a hut, if there is one, in the lead-up to a weather window. Plan B plus a chopper is probably the key to the majority of successful ascents in NZ.

Below: Disgruntled mountaineers edit signs to improve their accuracy

6. **Ground logistics** Mostly complicated (see "Approach"). For non-locals, getting enough kit in through airline weight limits and enthusiastic biosecurity is a problem. Postage can work, but sometimes your climbing ropes are (bafflingly) confiscated. Food can only be bought in NZ, and unless you have a well-developed shopping and packing plan, you end up carrying 10 kg of unwanted Weetabix to the bivvy, mostly in the granular form in your sleeping bag. Getting to the road-head can take a fair amount of planning, as often the car hire company doesn't want you on the road in question and your bank manager doesn't want you to leave the car there for ten days.
Emergencies

It’s a kindness to your nearest and dearest to give some thought to what to do if things go a little awry. Don’t assume that because there are three of you, one can go for help. It might take days. An EPIRB (with a GPS) is probably a minimum self-defence, but response can be slow. Satellite phones will always work but are expensive. The South Island “mountain radio” system is good and also gives access to weather forecasts. The sets themselves are built to withstand nuclear attack, however, and are rather heavy for a small group to carry. A tiny FM/AM radio will give access to weather data in most areas and this in itself can forestall many emergencies.

Food

Think about the menu, in detail, at the level of calories per gram. A good varied food plan keeps everyone energetic and cheerful. Think about cooking fuel, too. Gas will do more per gram than liquid fuel, as long as it’s not cold; when it’s around freezing, liquid fuel wins every time because it doesn’t have to vaporize to work. Pack food carefully in a bag for each day. Take a spare day or two... and a sneak treat or two for those morale-sagging moments (or days...)

Margin

You may not need oxygen tanks in these mountains but they are big; they rise from sea level, are very steep, remote, exposed to severe weather, and are festooned with unstable geological features of all kinds. You need margin in everything you do here; in time, food, clothing, shelter, and skill. It often means you’ll come down earlier than, with the benefit of 20:20 hindsight, seemed necessary - but you’ll be alive.

Winged pests

Keas are charming, intelligent alpine parrots with a well-deserved reputation for vandalism. If you can hear their cries, don’t leave a tent (or anything else you value) unguarded. At the other end of the scale, and lower in altitude, sandflies can make life a misery. DEET deals with them (but remember it can dissolve anything you are carrying, except, miraculously, your skin).

So why do it?

Because these are fabulously beautiful places, and there are not many left where you can experience nature on its terms, not yours. Don’t be fixated about reaching a dot on the map; a summit is great, but there is so much more to be enjoyed in every aspect of these great mountains. Make a plan (several plans). Enjoy.
Bushwalking is a uniquely Australian pursuit. Other countries have their own interpretations and speak of tramping, trekking, hiking, backpacking and rambling. We don’t do any of that here; we just bushwalk. Bushwalking is a year-round activity, and the ANUMC has a trip going each weekend. Bushcraft and navigation skills learnt while bushwalking, are essential for canyoning and cross-country skiing, and many experienced bushwalkers are also experienced canyoneers and cross-country skiers. Canberra is ideally located within easy driving distance of some of Australia’s great national parks and wilderness areas, leaving us absolutely spoilt for choice! Whether it be Namadgi, the Snowy Mountains, Kanangra, the Budawangs, or further afield, pack lightly, tread softly, and enjoy the experience.

Minimal impact bushwalking This is the name given to the principles of bushwalking etiquette. In the past, bushwalkers and explorers saw the bush as a place to be conquered by creating tracks, building huts, and generally disturbing the natural environment. Nowadays, bushwalkers are conservation defenders who are interested in the preservation of our natural areas. In August 1975, Ross Bradstock, then President of the Sydney University Bushwalkers, wrote the following in the Mount Mistake logbook:

"The members of this party hope that others who come to this remote hill will appreciate the unique opportunity of wilderness experience this area offers. We hope this ideal will be carried out by forever keeping out cairns, tracks, roads, huts and any other sign you have been here."

"Minimal Impact Bushwalking means do nothing, leave nothing that shows where you have been."

Become proficient at bush navigation

Bradstock’s exhortation to bushwalkers was as pertinent then as it is now. As bushwalkers, we have a moral duty to take a stand against governments, corporations, and individuals who would seek to harm and damage natural areas, especially our national parks which have been set aside for conservation and preservation.

The Confederation of Bushwalking Clubs NSW gives the following definition for minimal impact bushwalking:

"Minimal Impact Bushwalking means do nothing, leave nothing that shows where you have been."
Minimal Impact Bushwalking

The following comments have been adapted from the Confederation policy statement titled "Bushwalkers Code". Consider these when planning a trip, and encourage others also to practice Minimal Impact Bushwalking.

**Tread softly** Keep walking parties small in number; four to six people is ideal. Observe limits upon group size in wilderness areas. Wade through waterlogged sections of tracks; don’t create a skein of new tracks around them. Except in really rough terrain, wear lightweight, soft-soled walking shoes (e.g. Dunlop Volleys) or joggers rather than heavy, blister-causing boots.

**Camping** For shelter, carry a lightweight tarp or flysheet, or use a cave or rock overhang. Consider reserving the use of a tent for alpine and snow trips to save weight and minimise your impact on the bush. Huts on the mainland are for emergency shelter only – always be prepared to share the hut with others. Think twice about using a popular campsite to avoid overuse. If possible, vary your route slightly so that you can find an alternative site in a less frequented area. Leave your campsite pristine. After a few days it should be impossible to see where you were camped.

**Navigation** Become proficient at bush navigation. If you need to build cairns, blaze trees, place tags, carve arrows into rock, break off twigs, or tie knots in clumps of grass to mark your route, you are lacking in bush navigation skills. Placing signposts and permanent markers of any kind is the responsibility of the relevant land manager (such as the NPWS).
Minimal Impact Bushwalking

Be VERY careful with fire. In areas where fire is a natural part of the environment, a small cooking fire is not only appropriate, but enjoyable. Having said this, NEVER light fires in hot, summer conditions; in dry, windy weather; in declared fuel stove only areas; or when there is a declared fire ban. If you do light a campfire, follow these rules: Definitely don’t build a ring of stones as a fireplace. This is unnecessary and unsightly. Dismantle stone rings wherever you find them. Burn only dead wood which has fallen to the ground; don’t break limbs from trees or shrubs. Keep your fire small – remember, the bigger the fool, the bigger the fire.

Before you leave Douse your fire thoroughly with water, even if it appears to be already out. Scatter the cold charcoal and ashes well clear of your campsite, then rake soil and leaves over the spot where your fire was. You should aim to remove all trace of it.

Pack it in, pack it out. Don’t carry glass bottles and jars, cans, drink cartons lined with aluminium foil and excess packaging. Remove all your rubbish including food scraps, paper, plastic, aluminium foil and empty containers. Don’t burn or bury rubbish. Burning creates pollution and buried rubbish may be dug up and scattered by animals. Carry a plastic bag for your rubbish. If you find litter left by irresponsible people along the track or around a campsite, please remove it. Show you care for the environment, even if others don’t.

Keep water pure. Wash cooking and eating utensils well back from the edge of lakes and creeks so waste water falls on soil where it will be absorbed. Always swim downstream from where you get your drinking water.

Always swim downstream!

Bushwalkers enjoy a jaffle or two, but must always be very careful with fire!
Minimal Impact Bushwalking

Be hygienic ensure you are at least 50 metres from campsites, creeks and lakes, when going to the toilet. Wait until you get out of sensitive areas such as caves and canyons before defecating or urinating. Bury all faeces and toilet paper at least 15cm deep. In the snow, make use of a “poo-tube” and pack it out.

Protect plants and animals Try not to disturb wildlife. Remember, you are the trespasser.

Be courteous to others The sound of radios, CD players, mobile phones and similar devices is out of place in the natural environment. If you wish to carry a mobile phone, use it only for summoning aid in an emergency. Keep it switched off until needed.

Happy walking!

Tom

For more information on Minimal Impact Bushwalking, visit the website of the Confederation of Bushwalking Clubs NSW Inc.

http://www.bushwalking.org.au
Lured by the promise of beautiful views in Victoria’s high country, and a notch on the belt to climb the state’s tallest peak, our troop of eight set off on Friday evening toward (the notably un-mothy), Mt Bogong.

Leaving late afternoon on the Friday, our trip leader Steve led the charge south, arriving at our campsite just before midnight. The ritual setting up of tents and tripping over newly acquainted tent buddies in the dark unfolded as one would expect, before succumbing to a satisfying slumber.

The next morning we woke in beautiful surrounds, complete with nearby flowing stream (Mountain Creek) and the friendly twitter from birdlife and neighbouring campers alike. We set off for the 6km trek up the Staircase Spur (rising 1350m) to Mt Bogong’s peak in fabulous summer morning weather.

The hike up through beautiful forests of ghostly Alpine Ash trunks burnt from the 2003 bushfires was equally steep as it was stunning. Dense green regrowth covered every available inch of ground, competing to make their mark in the new generation of Ashes. Rising to a height of about 5-6 feet, it gave a wonderful sense of trekking through lush bushland, yet still allowed us glimpses of stunning views looking back down to the scenic countryside from where we began.

Along the ascent, an ongoing game of tag between us and a group of day-trekkers ensued. The fact that we were repeatedly caught and passed by this group of sexagenarians somewhat played on the troubled minds of our comparatively young-limbed bodies. However, our ‘competitors’ politely noted that we were ladened with much heavier packs, and so were not to be embarrassed by their several over-takings.

As the Alpine Ashes disappeared and Snow Gums prevailed, the weather took a dramatic turn to the less friendly, and had us scampering to put on our wet weather gear. Now at considerable altitude, a thick fog closed around us and gusts of wind started pushing some of us around like tenpins. Despite the conditions and poor visibility, the craggy alpine terrain enticed us along, teasing us with the knowledge that the peak couldn’t be too far away.

At 1985m up, we had reached the top. Putting our best smiles on for the camera, sheltering by the summit’s considerable cairn, we took a few quick happy snaps to mark our accomplishment. Disappointedly aware that our stunning scenic pics at the summit would have to wait for the return trip, (and that pausing for anything longer could cause human stalagmitation), we continued on in pursuit of our overnight destination.

As the seemingly gale force winds continued, visibility now down to about 30 metres, and the ground beneath our feet turning into a flowing river of chocolate milk thanks to the pouring rain and hail, I quietly thanked the gortex gods for so kindly having bestowed upon us jackets for occasions such as this. Unfortunately it was too late for my now saturated feet, swimming in the (unheated) indoor swimming pools that were my boots. Yet the troop marched vigilantly onward, guided by our competent leaders following the snow post trails.
Then, there it was; like the enchanting castle from Neverending Story emerging out of cloud in the distance, was the welcome sight of the Cleve Cole Memorial Hut. (Please kindly allow a moment here for the heraldic angelic harmonies to sound for full effect) … Once inside, we found we had been beaten to the mark by some other campers. However this was a fortuitous event, as a warm fire had already been stoked up, ready for our arrival. Wet and soggy’s removed, we sat out the worst of the weather before the more fool hardy of us ventured out once more to set up tents and check out the nearby waterfall.

Dinner that night was around the sturdy wooden table inside Cleve Cole Hut where the suitably qualified chefs de camp unveiled their culinary masterpieces. Dishes that included (fresh!) vegetable coconut curries and cous cous creations where unveiled one by one to the salivating recipients… Eating alone, I noted my cardamon and sultana TVP dish, (despite evoking some polite curiosity), was clearly not on par with my fellow campers. It was then that I made a quiet mental note to self: “Must attend next ANUMC camp cook off event” to expand upon my lacking repertoire.

A night of frozen toes and sufficient mustering of courage to put on the preceding day’s damp clothes later, we set off the next day toward the summit on our return journey. The morning was crisp and clear, the chocolate milk river had returned to a solid state, and the prospect of a fabulous view from Mt Bogong’s peak beckoned us. Views of the surrounding alpine countryside were enjoyed by all, and the skiers among us were sizing up the slopes for prospective ski runs come the winter months.

Now, I’m not sure if it was just bad luck (or should we have perhaps given the weather man a bit more credibility when he forewarned us of gusty winds, hail and snow?) …but as we climbed to the summit again, it appeared that the climactic events of the day before were determined to repeat themselves. And so, enjoying our summit scenic vistas solely in varying shades of white would have to suffice.

We completed our trek by returning on the Eskdale Spur track via Mitchel’s hut. Once again, the scenery was lush, the paths were steep (yet so much easier going in the other direction!) and the huge contrast in conditions was amazing. Within what seemed like moments, we were stripping back down to shorts/singlets again, galumphing down the sunny hillside in lifted spirits.

A few stories shared and sore knees later, we arrived back at our Mountain Creek starting point, happy, adequately fatigued, and with a reinvigorated appreciation for just how good camping in good weather really is!

As for the stunning view from Victoria’s highest peak? Well, that will just have to wait until next time.
With the imminent onset of winter, the ANUMC is about to launch into its extensive winter program of cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. Most people know about skiing, but what is snowshoeing? Snowshoeing is winter bushwalking over snow with the aid of snowshoes. Traditionally, snowshoes looked something like tennis rackets strapped to feet. Modern snowshoes, including the MSR Denali style of snowshoe available to club members from the ANUMC gear store, look more like some sort of plastic board, often with sharp serrated edges on the bottom and rubber straps along the top.

Like cross-country skiing, snowshoeing gives you the freedom to explore the backcountry in winter without sinking deep into the snow. While you don't travel as far or as fast on snowshoes as you do on skis, with snowshoes you can traverse icy conditions or terrain such as heavily wooded areas and steep slopes that most skiers (other than the very experienced or very foolish) avoid or can't even enter. Snowshoes are also easier to carry during those annoying occasions when the snow runs out and you have to walk to the next patch of white stuff.

Snowshoeing is an increasingly popular activity in Australia and the ANUMC. This popularity is partly due to the simplicity and accessibility of the activity. Snowshoeing requires less skill than skiing and, because you don't race down mountainsides at tremendous speeds, there's less chance of serious injury. Aside from the snowshoes themselves, which are available from the gear store, you don't need any special footwear other than hiking boots and warm socks (sorry Tom, but Vollies just won't do!). Most people find keeping their balance and hence carrying a pack on snowshoes easier than on skies (just don't try walking backwards!) Beginners in particular who have never before been to the snow often find snowshoeing the ideal way to confidently experience the breath-taking beauty and solitude of the Australian Alps in winter. If you are looking to try snowshoeing for the first time, keep your eyes open for day trips to popular locations such as the Rams Head Range in Kosciuszko National Park.

The Bushwalking Officer coordinates the snowshoeing program with assistance from experienced members who run numerous snowshoe trips each winter. Demand for snowshoe trips is however typically higher than what the club's small band of experienced snowshoers can satisfy, so that disappointed members often miss out. If you are one of these unfortunates, and you enjoy leading, then perhaps you should consider leading a trip yourself, thereby putting a little something back into your club. There are plenty of trip options to choose from.

One of the best alpine snowshoe trips available is the 4km return walk from Dead Horse Gap (1582m) to the summit of South Rams Head (2052m). Dead Horse Gap, just beyond Thredbo on the Alpine Way, is usually easily accessible by car, and likely to have snow even when the cover elsewhere is meager. Snowshoes excel on this route, particularly in the snow gum forest on the lower slopes, and on the frequently
icy conditions near the exposed crest of the Rams Head Range. Even in poor conditions, the approach to the summit is relatively sheltered and short, and not too taxing, enabling a snowshoer to get a mild taste of mountaineering without all the associated risks. On a clear day the views from the ice encrusted trig point are stunning, especially north across the headwaters of Leatherbarrel Creel to the snow mantled eminence of Mt Kosciuszko, just 6km away.

There are also a range of options for easy snowshoe walks along the Kosciuszko Road between Guthega Road and Perisher Valley. Depending on where good snow cover begins you can pull over to the side of the road at any of the chain bays, strap on your snowshoes and head south from the road towards the crest of Rams Head Range. Easy to reach worthwhile destinations include Rainbow Lake, Moon Rock, Pretty Point, Prussian Plain and Porcupine Rocks. All provide excellent opportunities to experience the winter grandeur of the mountains.

In addition to day trips there are also various overnight snow-camping trips to places such as Cascade Hut, Whites River Valley and, for the more adventurous, on the Rams Head and Main Ranges. Last year there was even a week long trip to walk Tasmania’s Overland Track in mid-winter. The first snowshoe trip to be posted onto the trip calendar for this season is a moderately challenging overnight walk from Guthega power station over Mt Gungartan to Tin Hut. This is reasonably long walk for snowshoes and not suitable for everybody. Until you gain some experience it is prudent to be conservative about how far you expect to travel in a day. Remember too that trips are weather and snow dependent so planned trips don’t always go head but they are great fun when they do. So this winter, strap on a pair of snowshoes and head for the hills.

Left: Snowshoers before North Rams Head
Above: Sam and Fiona
Below: Snowshoers above Dead Horse Gap
Malo e Lelei

Tropical South Pacific islands always have a certain fascination for coconut fringed beaches, warm waters, beautiful “vahines” dancing in harmony, feasts of fruits, succulent seafood and easy going life style. Numerous authors wrote many novels on (mis)adventures in the Pacific. Hollywood produced many memorable movies including Roger and Hammerstein “South Pacific” and John Wayne’s finest light hearted movie “Donovan’s Reef.”

Yi, a keen ANUMC member volunteered to spend a year in Tonga as part of an AUSAID Youth Ambassador programme. She invited ANUMC members to visit and get to know the island paradise kingdom where time proceeds at a snail’s pace.

Three of us (Yves, Michal, me) landed at Nuku’alofa one balmy evening to be greeted by Yi and her boyfriend Lionel. Yi’s hospitality was immediately evident when we sat to a big mud crab feast. What a way to start the holiday. Over the next two days we visited/drove over Tongatapu (Main Island) and checked some of the sights, walked to beaches, witnessed blowholes and scrambled down a sinkhole. The highlight was OhOLEI beach and the cultural show. The show was a well-polished performance alternating between the swaying hands of women and energetic movements of the warriors. The final act was a dazzling display of firestick twirling. The kerosene soaked light reflected off the walls of Hina’s cave and accentuated the intricate and acrobatic movements of the dancers. Actually, the real highlight was the traditional feast prepared at the cultural show. An “umu” - traditional earth oven cooking. Yuuuuum. Four variations of root vegetables, salads, seaweed salad, raw fish salad, octopus salad, two large baked fish, chicken dish and a crispy baked sucking pig. I honoured the hosts, and showed my appreciation for their cooking, by piling my banana stem plate three times. That night was great eating.

Eua island was our first destination. We camped in a garden setting with coconut and banana trees for sentries. Eua is a mountainous island (by Tongan standards) with cliffs, jungles, overgrown trails and lookouts. We spent three days bushwalking, swimming, sightseeing, eating bananas, drinking coconuts, slicing pawpaws and repelling mosquitoes. On the last night our hostess prepared an “umu” and we feasted again.

Piggy-san was a real omnivorous pig and the local organic garbage disposal unit at Yi’s residence. The majority of Tongan residences own pigs, dogs, chickens and the occasional goat or horse. Australians are rather sheltered from everyday contact with farmyard animals and becoming acquainted with Piggy-san was an eye opener. Piggy-san’s mission in life was simple: to eat anything anytime in order to increase his bacon girth to provide dinner on the table at a future date. He would come at a hurried pace for the kitchen scraps. His consumption of fruit and vegetables was expected and insatiable. His consumption of cracked coconuts interesting. His consumption of fish bones and crab shells amusing. However, it was his consumption of lobster shells that was awe-inspiring. Lobsters have a very tough exoskeleton and the claws are hardened barbed calcium ready to
tear hands and cheeks off humans. To extract the meat involves smashing the claws with a hammer. Piggy-san just “chewed” along the barbed claws with a nonchalant and pleasurable attitude.

The plane landed at Vava’u and we joined Katarina. The pattern was now established. We would retreat to an island and pretend we were in Paradise. Swim in warm waters, snorkel in transparent waters, paddle a kayak, laze in a hammock, read a book (or ten), walk on a beach or swat the occasional mosquito. We initially stayed at Ofu island and could have stayed longer. We also stayed at Tapana island and could have stayed shorter. The definite highlight was Soki’s Island tour. We chartered Soki’s boat and toured around the Vava’u archipelago. We moored here and we moored there to snorkel, swim and snooze. The very best was kept till last. Swallows Cave. The Cave is a large marine cave in which the boat ventured. The cave floor was 18m deep and absolutely clear water. Every bottom detail was discernible beneath the boat: a great vista of colours, cave formations and occasional fish. Katarina’s insistence at dining at the “Dancing Rooster” was well rewarded. The Swiss trained chef prepared the best-cooked meal that we had in Tonga. Really nice fish, meat, vegetables albeit at a price.

The group was now disbanding. Yves, Michal, Katarina, Yi and Lionel returned home and I still had three days. I took the plane to Ha’apai and was now on my own with prospects of non culinary delights given my reticence at cooking. Fortunately the host provided local food dinners and bought dinner every night.

“Uoleva Captain Cook” resort was a site for one of Captain Cook’s anchorages as he visited the “Friendly Islands”: I now slipped back into the friendly tropical spirit and just laid in a hammock most of the day reading “Robinson Crusoe”. In the morning I got up late, wandered down 10m to the water, had a swim, thought about breakfast, lazed in the hammock, had a swim, lazed some more, had a walk, lazed some more, ate, lazed even more, snorkelled, lazed again, dined, watched the beach bonfire and slept. A wonderfully pleasant indolent lifestyle.

All good things come to pass and after a seeming eternity it was time to return and end the holiday. No wait – there is more. Sunday in Tonga is rather sacrosanct. You are not allowed to do anything except go to church, sing hymns, eat and sleep. Shops are shut, no swimming, no sport, no biking, just nothing except Pangaimotu Island resort. The resort is the outlet for pent up energy that needs to be released. It is just over one kilometre from Nuku’alofa and has excellent trade on Sundays. The authorities ignore it as a means of keeping the peace with those hedonistic expats who wish to drink beer, swim, eat and spend money on holy days. Next to the resort were two wrecks that provided opportunities to do some wreck snorkelling.

The adventure was now over however not the feasting. Yi was keen on her food and organised one more feast. She found some good value lobsters in the fish markets. It was the first time I had lobster and decidedly delicious. Piggy-san noisily and heartily agreed.

Malo aupito

Left: Sunset
Below: Paddling around Tampana resort
Sun Sea Sand and Coconut trees
Nota: in case you think that this gastronomical journey was typical of my trips please rethink. It was a temporary aberration as I succumbed to the temptations of the bountiful feasts. My normal Epicurean dinners consist of instant mashed potatoes, cheese, wheatgerm and pasta sauce.

TONGA FACT BOX

Tonga is a large archipelago consisting principally of four island groups. (Tongatapu, Vava'u, Ha'pai, Nieu). Its latitude is circa 18South and loosely corresponds with Townsville. Its average temperature whilst we were there was 27 +/- 1 degree over 24 hours. It is the only kingdom in the Pacific and has strong historical links with Captain Cook who mistakenly dubbed them "The Friendly Islands".

There are approximately 100,000 inhabitants and another 100,000 living in NZ, Australian and other Pacific islands. Religious missionaries were extremely successful and Tongan way of life is dictated by religious principles.

Its combined land area is 718 km² (ACT => 2280 km²) (Kozi Nat Park => 6900 km²)
Get ready for Winter! Rainbow Lake, Kosciuszko NP- 27th April, 2009  Photo: Tom Gleeson