

## **BREAKING IN OTMC Bulletin, April 1987, (Page 5)**

I knew no one as I nervously climbed onto the bus and sat prim and proper amongst the mattresses and sacks, silently awaiting what was to come. Suddenly a body threw itself into the middle of us and began talking. Incredibly he was still talking as we approached our shelter at Mt Cook.

The surprise of that Southern night sky, seen for the first time unhindered by neon, as it shimmered and sparkled above the snow, remains with me even now. Like children we hung our heads in awe, spotting our favourites, gleefully delighting in shooting stars. Thus released, I could sleep content beneath this jewelled heaven, then awoken to find a sky transformed, now watery and pale, and the peaks' crystal crowns gleaming red in the early sun.

As the cookers flared and muesli was consumed by the kilo, so preparation for the day's work began; and then truly the men were separated from the boys. The Mueller party, packs neat and solid, crampons and ice-picks at the ready, marched away purposefully. Then we strolled off, with sun cream, shorts and sand shoes towards Hooker.

Mt Cook stood proudly above us, gleaming blue and clear, leading us on. Almost immediately, it seemed, we came upon the hut. Then the third meal of the day, a well-earned (?) lunch. The secret of light packs is one thing at least that we could teach the experienced climbers; not for those unfinished sacks of food to give away on our return.

All were buzzing with energy, too excited to stay still. Inspired by sun, uplifted by the majestic surroundings, we burst forward towards the Copland Pass. Once over a decaying gully, sides sheer, rock loose and crumbling, we once more forgot all fear and set off upwards. Carole and Lutz skipped on ahead like mountain goats, as if born to the mountains. Carelessly we played snowballs and threw each other in the snow. Excitement, undulled by turning back, infected even our "father figures" who rode on ahead down the scree, far further than they needed.

With achievement, so the group knitted together and a sense of closeness grew. We talked more freely. Jill was confident enough to ask Mike for a hand back across what was for all a more than untrustworthy ravine. Barriers broken, our fiendish German cookie eater could now scavenge his weekend feed. I went out to play, while as if by magic, tents went up and meals were prepared. (What are team leaders for, after all?). Cards for some, crosswords for others, lateral thought for yet more. Jenny, expert murderer, discovering the simplicity of snowmen.

The weather broke and the storm approached. Graeme, bless him, wondered which of the huts bunks would be most draughty. Dave et al. prepared for a sure night beneath canvas proven to withstand the Gods worst, I was ordered to my fly, exposed and pitiful by the immense glacier.

"Who forgot the tent" - "Too heavy to carry." Doug assured me.

The fly bounced up and down in agreement. Draughty admittedly, but protection at least against the rain? No problem for Carole, snuggling up to the warmth of Graeme and Lutz on either side. I had few complaints, except sleeping on my back, which likened to sleeping under a shower, while slapped in the face with a wet flannel. Not so for Mike and Doug, kindly sleeping in the rain to protect us at either end. In the grim night, physical closeness mirrored our feelings, which continued back to desserts at Governors and beyond. We laughed at our situation - my summer holiday - mocking complaints of dampness and wondered at the wisdom of sleeping beneath a hang glider in those conditions.

The morning was unrelenting, but we could now face it and smugness grew when we realised the other fortress / Tent had disappeared early in the night. The kitten had indeed stolen the

cream. The hut, now claustrophobic, was far too crowded for real men to eat breakfast, so we stayed in our little haven, later, by the vans, Dave called: "Come over here and pay hut fees."

'Hut fees? - What hut fees...!'

*Lutz and Graeme*

*for Doug Pagel, Mike Farrell, Graeme Black, Carole Dixon, Lutz Beckert.*