

CHRISTMAS TRIP – NELSON LAKES (1986-87) OTMC Bulletin, March 1987, (Page 4-5)

On Boxing Day 1986, some 22 people converged on the Lewis Pass from as far afield as Nelson and Ohai. After camping in the area overnight, 2 parties set off up Cannibal Gorge to the Ada Pass through the Spenser Mountains while 2 other parties went to Lake Rotoiti. These parties were headed for a round trip up the Travers and down the Sabine to Lake Rotoroa.

Mike's and Bruce's parties travelled more or less together (we became less unsure as the trip went on whose party Bill was in: he was always there when food was on the go!). We camped the first night in the basin below (and 5 of) Ada Pass. Meanwhile Muriel and co. took the spare cars around to Lake Rotoroa and organised the Water Taxi for the return trip out from Sabine – en-route they had day trips to Lake Daniells and the Lyall Creek Walkway.

At first the weather was great, and those of us who crossed the first pass (6,300 ft) on the second day enjoyed clear views all around - but a day later - up the E. Matakītaki - it was a very different story. By that time the rain had started and continued all day Monday and Tuesday with snow down to 3,000 ft and around the hut. Clearly we were not going over the next 6,000 ft pass yet and spent the time in the hut and / or pit considering alternatives and possible escape routes.

Meantime most other parties were hut-bound in the Sabine or Travers Valleys. However, Dave and Co. had already climbed Mt Angelus (Dave with his trusty crutches!).

Hut book information told us that there was a better crossing at the head of the E. Matakītaki than the known David Saddle route - an unnamed pass same miles to the E. This we made use of on the next day when clear skies and brilliant sunshine rapidly cleared most of the recent snow. About 700ft of snow climbing - led by Bruce plugging steps - brought us to the saddle by early afternoon and a fine view down the D'Urville Valley. After a steep descent on mean snowgrass, and narrowly avoiding a huge rock which tried to bowl me into the D'Urville, we camped near the top Biv.

From there our trip down the D'Urville was enjoyable in real Summer conditions. New Year was spent in the bush, under Bruce's balloons, and beside a great campfire - which later saw the ceremonial burning of Dave's decrepit and crutchless shorts! Dinner came in about 5 courses and was accompanied by A-D mints, Bailey's, Dram etc. etc. - it really is amazing what OTMC members are prepared to carry over 2 high passes to enjoy New Year's properly!

Unfortunately, the tentative plan for all to gather at Blue Lake for New Year was foiled for us by the weather, but we understand that similar party spirit prevailed in the Sabine Valley where all the parties gathered.

With the aid of some friendly fisher-folk at the Morgan's Hut we were able to convey a message to the others at the Sabine hut. This meant that the Water Taxi which Muriel had arranged was able to divert to the D'Urville hut to pick us all up from there on the final Saturday morning.

At this stage we caught up with news from the other parties and learned, among other things that Dave and Ian had climbed Travers the hard way, and that Glenda had made it to Blue Lake despite having a real bad time with blisters.

The final tales were exchanged over beers in the Hammer Springs pub, and in the pools in the evening: a fitting end to a memorable trip.

Mike Floate for the 22 people (OTMC members and friends) who enjoyed the Christmas -
New Year 1986-87 trip.