

(Pre Otago Tramping Club)

From Mount Allan to Waitati via Silver Peaks

December 26, 1922

This trip report was published in the Otago Daily Times on December 30, 1922, and given some of the participants, it is probable that this is one of many trips prominent tramping enthusiasts undertook that directly led to the formation of the Otago Tramping Club in August 1923. An early OTC publication included the following statement:

The following personnel – O. Balk, P.L. Ritchie, G. Wright, R. Gilkison, W. Main, Mr. Clayton, Mr. Marlow and J. Knox – having had a splendid walk over the peaks from Mount Allan to Waitati, were coming down Green Hill, when the topic was 'Why not start a Tramping Club' so as to give some of the pleasures which we got out of the different walks and over tracks to the younger folks'

Based on this statement and other references, it appears that the trip from Mount Allan (station) to Waitati via the Silver Peaks was a common enough trip. The OTC first undertook this trip on Labour Day in October, 1923, the second month of organised club trips.

The core of this trip is the Silver Peaks, and it remains today a beautiful rugged mountain range. Even though trampers have enjoyed the Silver Peaks for over 100 years, even today there still remains a significant number of people in the city oblivious to their existence. This trip can more or less be undertaken today, albeit through forest on one side, and gravel roads on the other, and it is planned to feature in the club's '100 Trips for 100 Years' as part of the OTMC Centenary.

A Boxing Day Walk

(published in the Otago Daily Times, 30/12/1922)

One of the most beautiful walks around Dunedin for scenery and easy climbing is from Mount Allan to Waitati, via the Silver Peaks. A party consisting of Mrs C.J. Hayward, Misses Kathleen Knox and Lily Fraser (aged 12), Messrs Main, Knox, Balk, C.J. and Keith Hayward, W. Fraser, Hugh L. Johnson, M'Keown, G.D. Wright, A.J. Wilson and son (aged nine), made the trip on Boxing Day under perfect conditions.

Arriving at Mount Allan, on the Otago Central Railway, they started the climb looking up the 'Big Creek' valley, the foxgloves on the track being in beautiful array. After a warm and strenuous climb of nearly an hour the party halted for a refreshing cup of coffee. Having now risen to a height of fully 1000ft, a good view was obtained, but nothing compared to what was to follow.

A steady pull along a winding track took the party past Mount Allan (2345ft) and unfolded a superb view over the rugged Christmas Creek Valley, with the double cone of Mount Misery standing boldly in the distance. At this point a halt is made, and as no water is handy on the high ridge which the track has been following, some canned pineapple is partaken of and greatly relished.

Now the real Silver Peak country is reached, and. As the hard climbing is over, the beautiful scenery, which includes a magnificent beech forest in a deep gully, is enjoyed to the full. Winding first to the right and then to the left in a big sweep, at last the camping place near the Peak is reached.



Above: Looking towards Mt Allan from the tops of the Silver Peaks

The younger members of the party have pushed on ahead and got the billy boiling, and never was a cup of tea more welcome. After full justice had been done to the multifarious contents of the rucksacks, the party climbed Pulpit



Above: The tops of the Silver Peaks...Pt 2495ft (760m) on left with Pulpit Rock also 760) near centre. Route from Mt Allan traverses ridge on right hand side.

Rock (2494ft) and gazed upon the most extensive view in the vicinity of Dunedin, stretching Mount Ida and Hawkdun Range, past the Rock and Pillar, Lammerlaws, to the Blue Mountains and Nuggets. Even a peep of the snow covered 'Umbrellas' is visible on a clear day.

The Peak forms a quadruple watershed, as it is the source of the Silverstream, Big Creek, Christmas Creek, and the south branch of the Waikouaiti River, many of the gullies being heavily wooded. A wonderful charm is added to the view by the picturesque coastline and the intervening hills – Mount Charles, Mount Cargill, Mihiwaka, and Mopanui. Blueskin Bay, the source of many heavy and perplexing mists, on this occasion is quite clear, and Warrington nestling on the hills looks just the pretty spot it is.

Having recorded the names of the party on the 'Register' and with interest perused the names of other visitors and their experiences (sometimes of a rough nature!), the descent down the razor-back track is commenced, the views down the steep gullies on both sides constantly changing. An hour of this brings the party to the comparatively level track to Double Hill. It is here some attention to the track would be appreciated, as in damp weather it is very swampy where it winds through the manuka scrub.

The feature of this part of the track is a fine stretch of the high and rugged range of the Peaks from Pulpit Rock to the Devil's Gap, some six or eight miles in extent. Once around Double Hill the end of the journey is in view, and a pleasant track over paddocks and through bush takes the party to the train and home.

The track on the whole is so good that the 20 odd miles are covered without strain by even the youngest members of the party. To those who made the trip the first time it was a revelation, as they had no idea that such grand scenery is within easy reach of Dunedin, 'the City Beautiful'



Above: View from Pulpit Rock, looking north. It is possible the 'camping spot' referred to in the article is near the high point in the centre of the photo - trampers will be aware that the track is always wet in this area, indicating the presence of a nearby water supply (spring)

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2019 OTMC Comments

This trip can more or less still be completed today, with some changes. You can still catch a train to Mt Allan Station, but it is unlikely to leave the Dunedin Station at 7.52am. The return train to Dunedin left Waitati at 6.50pm, so trampers would have to carefully manage the time during the trip.

A quick measure of the likely route on today's map of the area shows around 23km - the 20 miles (32.1km) noted in the article is probably a guess, but nonetheless this is a good day's tramping.

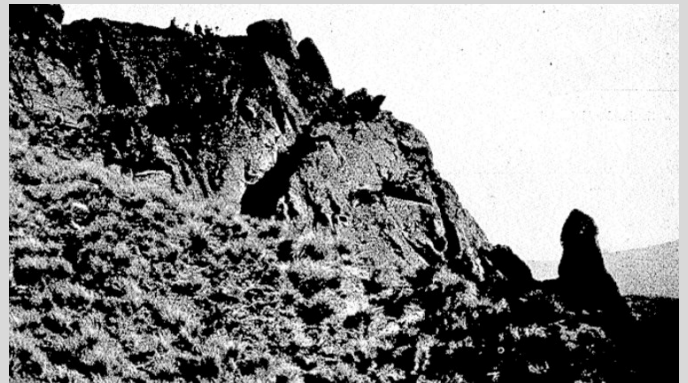
The 'superb view of Christmas Creek' past Mt Allan would have to be the tributary that commences at The Painted Forest, about 2km west of Silver Peak. The 'magnificent beech forest in a deep gully' would have to be The Painted Forest, still dominant today.

There have been several references in the OTC archives about a 'boil up' spot near the tops of the Silver Peaks. As the party partook of pineapple earlier in the day due to a lack of water, you can presume the 'camping spot' was where the spring was located. This may still be flowing today - the more modern 4WD heading towards Pulpit Rock is normally wet and slippery - maybe something for a future trip to the 'Peaks' to look for.

The earliest reference I have seen for Pulpit Rock is a photo in the Otago Witness from July 17, 1918, captioned 'The Pulpit Rock, The Highest Point of the Silver Peaks'. We now know that Silver Peak (the top of the Devils Staircase) is 17m higher than Pulpit Rock. Christmas Creek more accurately flows from near Silver Peak.

The Otago Tramping Club repeated this trip on October 22, 1923, where 38 members joined another 7 from the club 3-day trip on Silver Peak (could have been confused with Pulpit Rock?). A further party from the Red Hut direction (located on the Mountain Track, now Mountain Road, about 1km north of the locked gate) meant 70 odd members were on the tops of the Silver Peaks on Labour Day 1923, just two months after the club's formation.

The Silver Peaks remain the club's most visited area, with 715 trips identified thus far on our trip database. The area is much more accessible than it was, but many of the traditional access routes remain, such as from Ross Creek, Flagstaff, Leith Saddle and Whare Flat. To have an asset like the Silver Peaks is a great thing for trampers, and is one of Dunedin's best kept secrets.

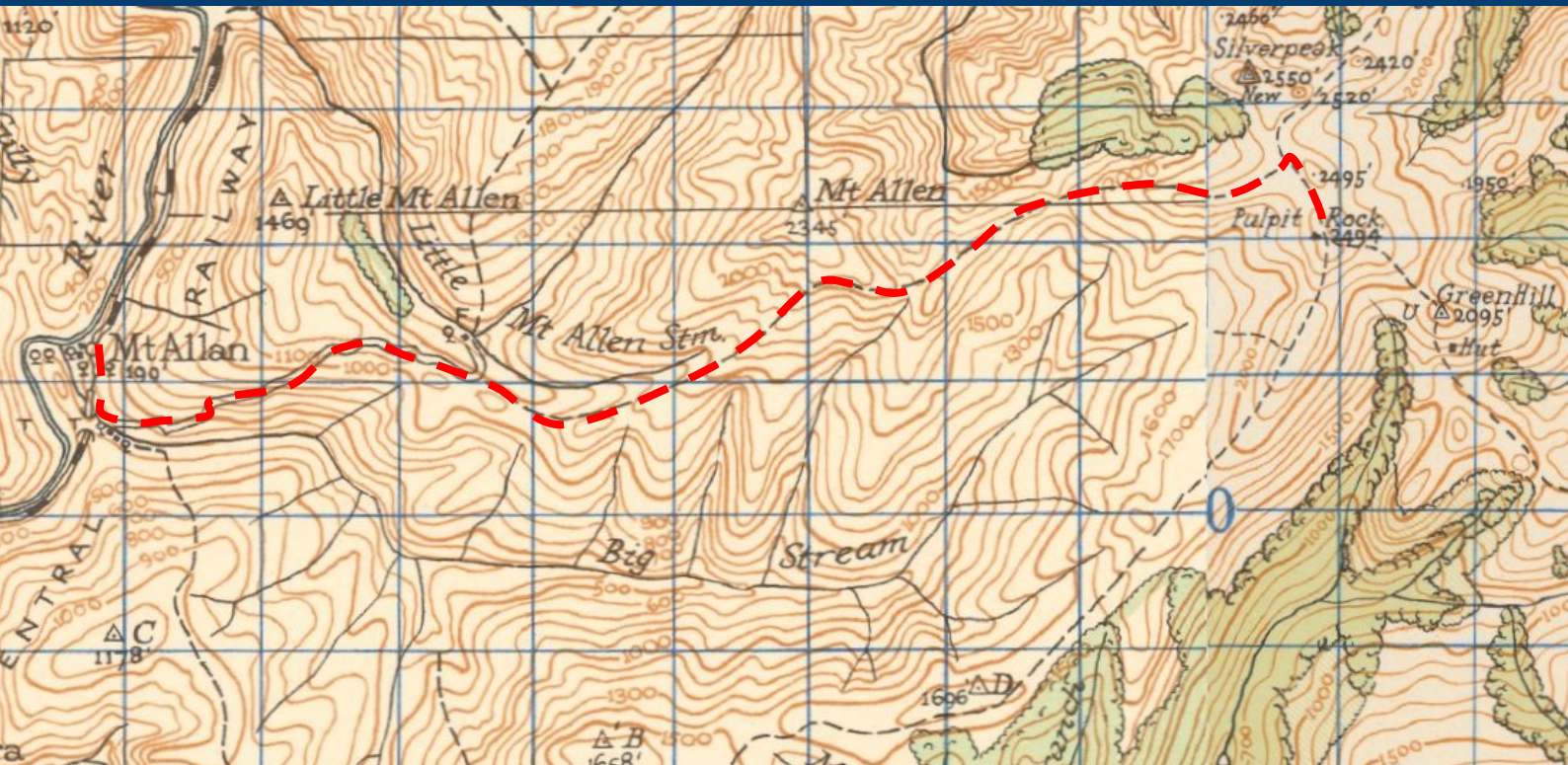


(ODT Article obtained from 'Papers Past - Otago Daily Times, Issue 18749, 30 December, 1922, other notes & photos by Antony Pettinger, August 2019)



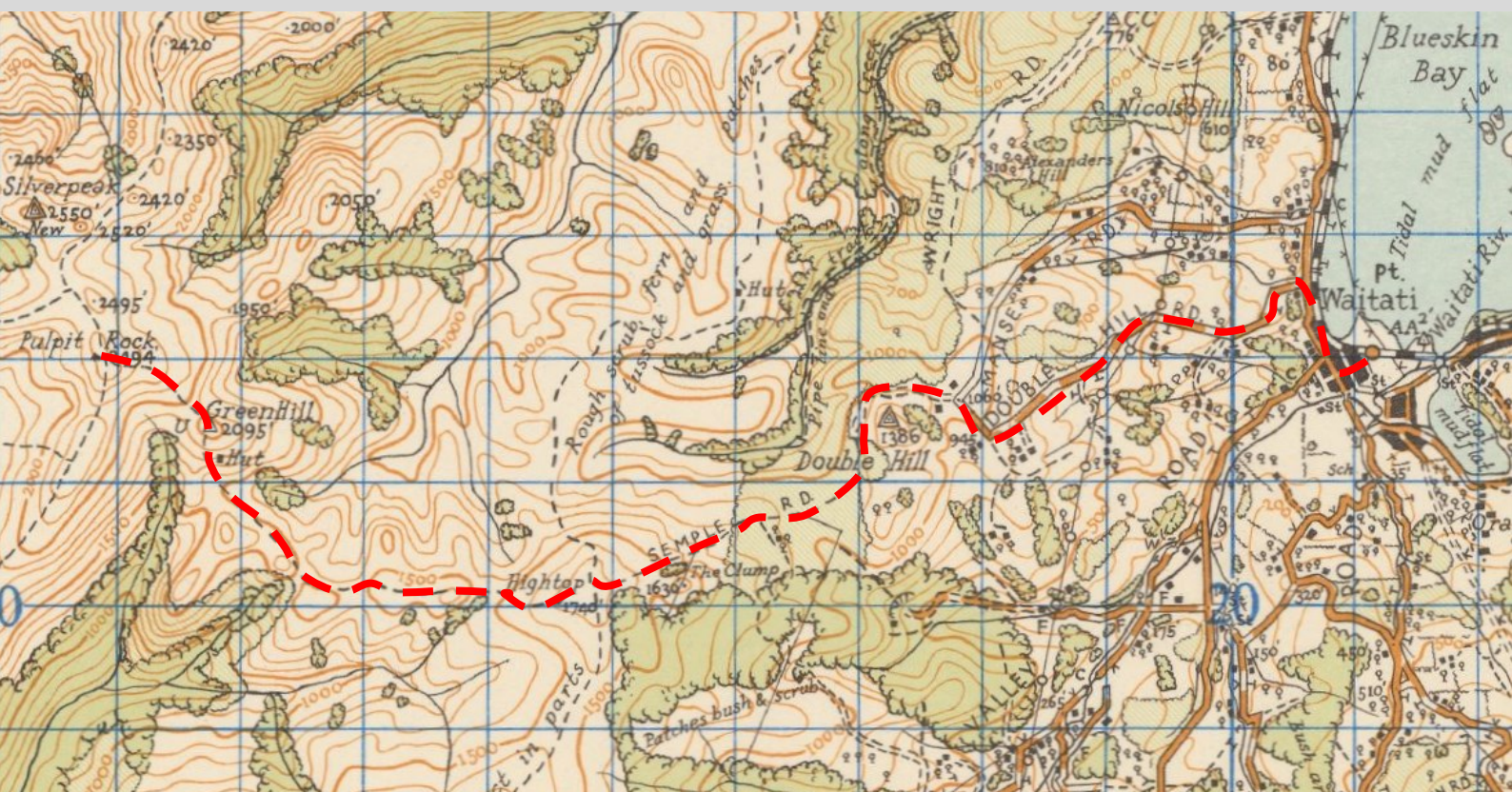
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Maps (NZMS1 S163 & S164)



Mt Allan Railway Station to Pulpit Rock via Big Stream and ridge line south of Mt Allan

This area is predominately part of the Wenita Forest, and numerous forestry roads criss-cross this area. Poplar Hut (was?) located at the junction of Little Mt Allen Stream and the 4WD track heading to the north. There was also another hut in Big Stream (Big Stream Hut), located 'about two miles below Pulpit Rock'. This hut was built with mud bricks and interlaced with manuka.



Pulpit Rock to Waitati, via Green Ridge, Hightop and Double Hill Road

The road beyond Double Hill (Semple Road) is relatively modern, and exists to support the forest plantations. Up until the 1980's the foot track to Green Hill traversed Hightop (the current Hightop carpark is relatively new). This makes sense when you look at the map, as trampers generally chose the most direct route, in the case it is more a or less a west to east line from Green Hill to Waitati. There are many stories within the club of how late one could leave from Green Hut to reach to train to Dunedin on time.