



OTMC Bulletin

Newsletter of the Otago Tramping
and Mountaineering Club (Inc.)



View from Mt St Bathans—22 November 2025
(photo by Giles Donneau)

Upcoming Trips

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| February | 1 Ship at Anchor (Lammermoors)
6-8 Routeburn North Branch (Waitangi Weekend)
15 OTMC Navigation (Flagstaff)
21-22 East Matukituki
22 Swampy Loop: Bullring– Rustlers Ridge return |
| March | 1 Christmas Creek (Silver Peaks)
7 Careys Creek (Silver Peaks) |

OTMC Gear Hire

A helpful feature of OTMC is our gear collection. This is available for hire, which is free for club members. Perennially, the most hired items are personal locator beacons (PLB), an essential item on any trip and should be prominent on your packing list. Popular items over the past six months of wintery conditions were ice axes, crampons and climbing helmets. Other available items include backpacks, first aid kits, snow shovels, tarpaulins, billies, climbing rope and gaiters.

Of course, carrying the gear on a trip is worthwhile only if you use it correctly. Ask your experienced club mates for advice on selecting the right equipment and for training in how to use it. Myself, I recently took crampons, ice axe, climbing helmet, and the advice I had been given, on a multi-day tramp. I was able to cross otherwise impassable alpine areas and complete my route. I encourage you to visit the gear cupboard, on a club night, to understand what is available for your use. Take a detour to the nearby clubroom corner, to visit our library which is a trove of books and maps to borrow.

I also encourage you to become involved in the running of our club and its activities. For me, recently taking on the role of Gear Hire Officer has been a low-effort exercise bringing small improvements to the existing situation, done with friendly assistance to ease me into the simple duties. We can all share the effort to maintain the club we love and appreciate, into the future, so I hope you'll find a way to join in.

Andrew Sewell
Gear Hire Officer,

Tramping Access to Macetown and Skippers

From the end of January 2026, vehicle access to Macetown will require a permit to pass through a gate about 3km from Arrowtown. Permit's cost \$40 per vehicle, however access for walkers and cyclists remain unrestricted and free. Funds raised from vehicle permit will be used for regular road assessments, maintenance and improvements.

The 124 year old Skippers bridge has been closed to all traffic including pedestrians and will remain closed indefinitely after excavation of the portion of cables buried underground in December 2025 had revealed "severe brittle failure" of wires on the left of the bridge. Engineers reports say that repair or replacing the damaged cables will be extremely difficult and costly with the strength of the cables being unpredictable and a sudden, catastrophic collapse is possible

A Successful Year at Leaning Lodge

Leaning Lodge has completed a very successful 2025 with 449 bed-nights (390 adults, 59 youths and children) proving the hut is a popular destination. April, November and December were all in excess of 50 bed-nights, March was close at 46. If you want to stay at Leaning Lodge, you can book at [Book Leaning Lodge Hut online](#) \$5,200 was contributed to the bank account (after DOC booking fees), although that was hit rather hard by Insurance costs of almost \$3,800.

The Leaning Lodge Hut Book is selling well, but we still have a few copies for anyone interested (\$40, email pdowsett@xtra.co.nz).



Dart Track Closure

A large slip in Dart Valley between Daleys Flat Hut and Chinamens Bluff has made the Rees-Dart Track circuit impassable for trampers. DoC Rangers have assessed the slip and the Dart Track is closed indefinitely.

Alternative options for trampers:

- Walk from Muddy Creek to Dart Hut and back out the same way (just Rees Valley)
- Walk over Cascade Saddle to Dart Hut and out along the Rees Valley.

More Huts in DoC Booking System

The Department of Conservation has added more huts and campsites to its booking system and now there is a total of 22 huts and 23 campsites that require a booking in the DoC booking system. DoC manages around 950 huts with the vast majority of these huts remaining non-bookable

DoC says that while backcountry huts are always unlocked and available to everyone, having huts in the booking system is a way to manage the number of visitors to reduce overcrowding. Booking a bed in a hut gives assurance to families and less experienced trampers that there is space for them.

The cost for staying in the newly bookable huts is the same as it was before and your Backcountry Hut and Campsite Pass includes the huts and campsites that require a booking. If using your hut pass, you still need to book your spot in the [DoC hut online booking system](#) and enter your hut pass details.

The huts newly added to the booking system in Otago/Southland are Port Craig School Hut and all those on the Hollyford Track—Demon Trail Hut, Hidden Falls Hut, Lake Alabaster Hut, Hokuri Hut and Martins Bay Hut as well as the nearby McKerrow Island Hut. Most campsites in Otago/Southland already require bookings.

Other bookable huts in Otago/Southland include all the huts on the Routeburn, Greenstone, Caples plus Jubilee Hut, Big Hut, Leaning Lodge, Aspiring Hut, Brewster Hut, Siberia Hut, Liverpool Hut, French Ridge Hut and Kirtle Burn Hut plus three on Rakiura/Stewart Island. Find out what the other bookable huts and campsites are on the [DoC website](#)



Trip Reports

Swampy Summit-Swine Spur-Jim Freemans-Ben Rudds

16 November 2025

By Ash Flintoff

On Sunday I meet 9 people at Woodhaugh Gardens for take 2 of this walk. The sun was shining, the wind was gentle and the Leith was a trickle compared to the original attempt a few weeks ago. We headed off to the Bullring where we met up with Mark. From the Bullring we headed up to Flagstaff and stopped to regroup and take photos of the specular views. From there we headed down to the Cross track before the along the Swampy Summit track to the Moon Track intersection for morning tea.

After our break it was onward and upwards to Swampy Summit where we stopped for a drink break

at the Swine Spur intersection. Now time for the fun down Swine Spur with Lucy doing a great job of leading us down the steep, slippery and slightly overgrown section of track till we reached the intersection of Possum Busters. Seeing it was right on 12 o'clock we stopped for lunch in the sun.

After Lunch and with a consensus we continued along the very interesting section of Swine Spur with a steep down sections and somehow we ended

up on the road due to a bit of a confusion over a new sign post. We doubled back a couple of hundred meters till we found the correct track and followed it the section known as the Steep Track with a few ropes to help us up. We then joined the Smithy's track and on to the bottom of the Jim Freeman Track.

A quick stop then up Jim Freemans to the Rhododendron Dell to look at the last of the flowering Rhododendrons before continuing up to Ben Rudds for afternoon tea and to sign the book. The final uphill section to the skid site and along the fire break track to the Bullring and home.

Thanks to Mark Stevenson, Tom Kirk, Lucy Jones, Bernie Dixon, Rob Seeley, Andrew Nelay, Roy Ward ,Tracy & Richard Pettinger for joining me Ash Flintoff on this adventure where we travelled 15.5km, climbed and descended 766m.



Ash giving directions (photo Tracy Pettinger)

Manuherikia, Mt St Bathans area, 22-23 November

By Giles Donneau

We headed to Homestead campsite on Friday afternoon. The road was rocky and dusty, but the landscapes were gorgeous. The campsite is basic: a fairly large grassy area surrounded by pines, a nice shelter from another century, two taps with clear water, a river, and a long-drop — which I'm still not very familiar with, but I have to say it is extremely convenient in the middle of nowhere.

The first evening was spent setting up the tents and discovering the site. We planned the next day: most of us were going to climb Mount St Bathans and return the same day, but Alex and his friend chose to camp up there and come back by paragliding the following day.

The next morning, we were ready to leave early. We started directly from the campsite in very thick fog; we could barely see more than 15 metres ahead of us. The fog lasted until the descent. On the way up, we followed a fence which ended before a steep ascent. Once that climb was over, we reached an altitude of 1,986 metres. There, the group split: some continued along the ridge while others stayed behind. There was a bit of snow on the ridge and plenty of black spiders. We were not far from the summit.



Heading up in the mist (photo Giles Donneau)

Once at the top — at 2,088 metres — we took a break near a small building fully equipped with electronic components. After cooking noodles and sharing some cheese's tips, we were already heading back down. The view was still hidden by the fog, but the weather was slowly improving and eventually we were able to spot the Alps.

We met the two brave paragliders/campers on the descent; they were carrying backpacks weighing 20 and 23 kilograms. The sun started to shine, and on the way back we saw a couple of lizards enjoying the warmth of the stones. The return was longer than I had expected, even though we found a shortcut full of mud and streams.

Back at the campsite, the little freezing stream became a treat to our sore feet. We could feel the almost 30 kilometres we had walked, and even though the cold dips were not enough to relieve the pain, nothing more was needed!

The next day was more relaxed. We headed to St Bathans town, and I swam a wee bit as the sun greeted us with much warmer weather than the day before. I will never forget the beautiful landscapes of the area. New Zealand never ceases to amaze me.

Pigeon Direct Track Work Party— 6 December 2025

By Jade Pettinger

Armed with a variety of power and non-power tools, 14 of us assembled bright and early on Saturday 6th December ready to clear the Pigeon Direct Track. After carpooling from Woodhaugh, we set off from Cowan Road for Pigeon Hill. The plan was to walk the length of the track from the road to Pigeon Hill, which would give us an opportunity to see the current condition and come up with a plan of attack.

We were pleased to see the track was dry, as it is often extremely boggy in the winter months. It wasn't too hard to follow the track - although this may have been because I was at the back and 13 people had just trampled through ahead of me. However, it was clear that the track was very overgrown and would require some serious pruning. Antony and Debbie had popped up the night before and cleared some trees which were blocking the track after the big winds in October

Once at Pigeon Hill, the boss (Antony) outlined the plan for the day, which



Track clearing team (photo Jade Pettinger)

basically was to cut back as much vegetation as needed to make a decent track. We agreed to rendezvous back at Pigeon Hill at 11am for smoko, gathered our tools and off we went.

We spread ourselves out along the track so we could cover ground more efficiently. Arthur brought along his scrub bar and did a fantastic job at tidying up the track near the start. Dylan and Debbie annihilated the vegetation on the side of the track using battery powered hedge

trimmers, Helen and Tracy used loppers to trim overhanging branches, Richard and Roy dealt to some pesky gorse and broom bushes and Dan trimmed the overgrown grass using a weed eater. Antony and Steffan carried on down the track further towards Pigeon Rock, making plans for future work parties. Others found ways to be helpful, whether it was removing the cuttings from the track or trimming greenery that may have been missed. The saying 'many hands make light work' is true - it was amazing what 14 people can achieve in just a few of hours. Having been on work parties in the past that have taken much longer with much less progress, I was amazed at how quickly we were able to clear the track all the way from Pigeon Hill to Cowan Road.

Walking back along the track to the cars, it wasn't hard to feel a sense of satisfaction. The difference in the track condition from when we started at 9am to 12pm was amazing. It now makes for a very enjoyable 15 minute walk from Cowan Road to Pigeon Hill. Plans are being made for a second work party in early 2026 where we will begin clearing down towards Pigeon Rock. Keep your eyes peeled for more information soon!

Jade Pettinger for Antony, Debbie and Dylan Pettinger, Daniel Coleclough, Arthur Blondell, Helen Emerson, Roy Ward, Steffan Rolfe, Richard and Tracy Pettinger, Tabitha Heaton and Molly Yar.

Day 1: Rock & Pillar– Big Hut—Middlemarch Camp **29 November 2026** **By Rob Seeley**

For those coming from Dunedin, it was an early start, so it was with not quite 8 hours sleep under my belt that I rendezvoused with Rebecca at her place. We picked up Gilles in Brockville and were on our way to the Strath Taieri. Even then the Mahinerangi wind turbines were turning a little faster than I would have liked but I kept this to myself.

We met up with the others of the team: Helen, Lucy, Ruth and Heather outside Helen's brother's house in downtown Middlemarch, dumping some stuff there, and continued to the Glencreag track carpark a bit up the road. Soon we were tackling the pretty much straight-up-the-gradient track that leads to Big Hut. A good workout indeed, but the sun was out and the views expanded generously as we rose and the wind still seemed manageable. We met quite a lot of people making their way down –it's good to see that the hut is getting a lot of use and by young people especially.

At some point Rebecca decided that the view was good enough for her and called it. The remaining six trudged on and made the hut in good order. There was lunch and a game of table tennis (or ping-pong as Heather called it) before the creaking of the hut and the sight of wind-borne



Rock & Pillar ascent (photo by Rob Seeley)

toilet paper alerted Helen, our leader, to the fact that if we were to make the summit we'd better get going. Heather went back down at this point with a tender knee leaving five of us to fight our way against wind and gravity and bag the summit!

But it was all quite exhilarating, making directly for the fabulously-shaped summit rocks over rough ground. Sure, it was windy as, but you could still stand up and make forward progress – a mere breeze by R&P standards, and we arrived at the summit rock (now down to 4) sheltering in its lee.

Not good enough though for, in a repeat of the previous week's adventure on Mt St Bathans, voices of dissent rose: no- there was the true summit, that rock with the ruined trig beacon on it! So on we battled till we were nes-



Rock & Pillar Summit (photo by Rob Seeley)

tling under the trig rock – it may not have been the summit but it did have the best view to the West. No view of Aspiring today, but Mt St Bathans was there which nicely filled in the geography for Gilles who had been on its summit seven days earlier. So back to the hut (which now has a veranda) and a few games more of table tennis (we were all

completely crap, even Ruth) before getting out of Dodge while we could. Even now parties of young-ies were heading up. Some were planning the traverse to Leaning Lodge which we counselled against citing gale force winds up top. (We actually had had this option ourselves and put in place a car at the Kinvara endvagaintst this eventuality). To Helen's delight the girl replied that "she'll be right", a kiwi phrase she'd been teaching Gilles.

Back in Middlemarch, we installed ourselves at the fine motor camp (with its entertaining black cat) and returned to Richard Emerson and wife Norma's house having been invited to have dinner there (joined by Lucy's mum, Juliet). There followed an evening of superb food and on-tap beer – a fine end to Day One of the Middlemarch camp – many thanks to Norma and Richard for their hospitality- and Rebecca and Helen for organising the whole thing.

Rob Seeley for Helen Emerson, Rebecca Armstrong, Gilles Donneau, Lucy Jones, Heather Taylor and Ruth Arnison

Day 2: Middlemarch Area—Sutton Salt Lake & Water Race 30 November 2025 By Andrew Sewell

Led by Lucy Jones, an 11 km excursion over rolling farmland visiting ancient geography and historical constructions.

Four day trippers from Dunedin joined much of the previous day's tramping party in the Middlemarch area on a breezy, warm day of high cloud. Beginning with a visit to a long-derelict schist hut, dating from the first attempt at farming the area, we followed the remnants of an extensive water race, built for mining operations during the long tail of the Otago Gold Rush.

Diverting onto a low ridge, the climb led to a world of schist pillars and waving grass.

Lunch in the lee of stone with a panorama of the Rock and Pillar Range, up Strath Taieri to the Kakanui Mountains. Past the dry Sutton Salt Lake and across fields to more, simple, redundant schist buildings: century-old NZ Artillery ammunition stores and cookhouse which most never knew existed.



Derelict schist hut (photo by Helen Emerson)

Thanks to Lucy and her family member, Juliet, for sharing their local knowledge and for their hospitality.

Andrew Sewell for Rebecca Armstrong, Fran Breedt, Gilles Donneau, Helen Emerson, Alice Fraser, Lucy Jones, Tom Kirk, Rob Seeley, Andrew Sewell, Heather Taylor.



Team photo at Sutton Salt Lake

(photo by Helen Emerson)

Burns Reserve/Gerry's Rock—28 December 2025

By Debbie Pettinger

While the Burns Reserve/Gerry's Rock trip was not an OTMC day trip, nine OTMC club members enjoyed the afternoon trip guided by Friends of the Burns Reserve trustee, Brian Langley with support of Friends of the Burns Reserve, Spen Walker and Jane Bruce (OTMC club members).

A group of 17 people met at the Signal Hill carpark and followed Brian over the fence into the lush podocarp forest of the Burns Reserve with the footing underneath being surprisingly dry after recent rain. The vegetation changed as we went from native bush, past a fernery, through a small patch of pine trees and back into the native bush. After following the contour line for most of the walk so far, we arrived at a steep ascent which took us up to a small plateau where we stopped to regroup, rehydrate and rest for a few minutes.



Through the lupins (photo Jade Pettinger)

For the next part of the trip we were out in the open with magnificent views of the Otago harbour as we skirted the edges of a farm paddock and wandered downhill amongst the colourful lupins. After re-entering the podocarp forest it was a short but steep climb to Gerry's Rock where we were greeted with stunning, uninterrupted views of Dunedin City and the Otago harbour. We spent some time enjoying the sunshine and wonderful views before Brian took us on a small detour to see the historical rock carvings. Then it was time to descend back into the bush and follow the track uphill, winding our way past a number of mature rimu, Miro and Totara trees. After about half an hour we arrived at a stile that took us to a road and the final walk down the road back to our cars.

Thank you to the Friends of the Burns Trust for a very enjoyable walk and it was great to see the work that has been done on the tracks and hear plans for further maintenance. A special thanks to Brian, Jane and Spen for being our 'guides' and sharing your knowledge of the reserve.

Debbie Pettinger for Jade, Richard and Tracy Pettinger, Ruth Thomas, Roy Ward, Charlotte Handley, Jane Bruce and Spen Walker

Rabbit Island/Blueskin Bay— 18 January 2026

By Steffan Rolfe

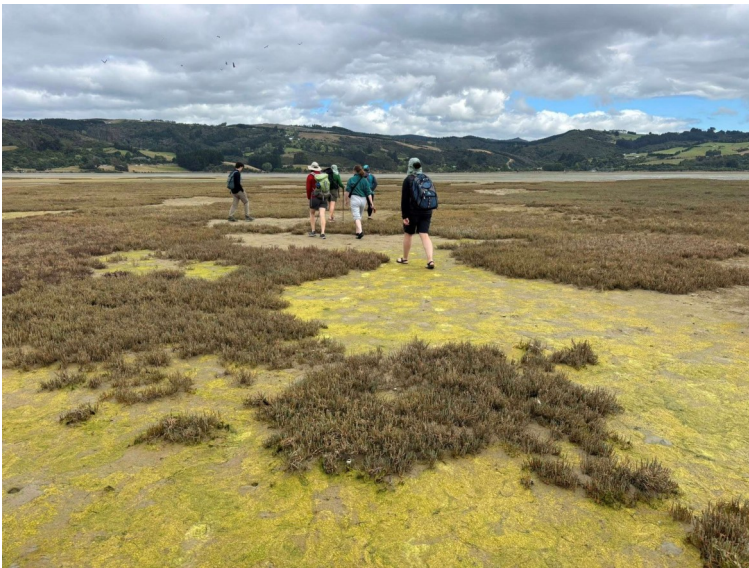
14 of us meet at Woodhaugh Gardens, loaded into cars and drove to the Warrington Domain. Rebecca had picked low tide for us to cross the estuary in Blueskin Bay and explore Rabbit Island. The weather over Blueskin Bay was sunnier than that in Dunedin, which set us up well for the morning. We crossed two channels, and crunched over empty cockle shells to get to the sandy shores of Rabbit Island. We then walked around the edge of Rabbit Island. There was plenty of time to explore the shells and random holes created by cockles and crabs along the way.

After an earlier lunch/morning tea, we headed into the depths of the Island, through coastal flats and into the pine trees and dense shrub in the interior. There were numerous signs of campers, and possibly even an occupied campsite that we came across along the way. We then started heading toward the western side of the island, however the dense broom, blackberry, and windfall had other plans. So we retraced our steps back to our morning tea spot, and then crossed over the estuary again. The tide had started coming back into, so the previous ankle high channels were now mid to high thigh height.

After getting back to the Carpark, the majority of the group headed to the beach at Warrington, and walked north to 'touch the rocks'. We also spotted a very subdued Sea Lion on the beach near the rocks. Then we headed back to

the cars, and got back to town around 1:30pm.

Great to see a number of new people coming along for a cruisy morning walk – hope we see you all again.



Walking around Rabbit Island
(photo Helen Emerson)

Steffan Rolfe for Rebecca Armstrong, Helen Emerson, Lucy Jones, Steffan Rolfe, Kate Botting, Vanessa & Ben Heally + Isla & Oliver, Qa-t-a Amun, Adam Dockerly, Thomas & Hannah Baird, Natasha Squire