



Kia ora ...

BOOTS June 2020

WCAC AGM:

THIS THURSDAY 18TH JUNE 6:30 PM, PAROA HOTEL

A very timely move to level 1 and we can now have our AGM in person!

So join us for what promises to be a great opportunity to catch up, and of course, to get the formalities of the AGM done and dusted for another year. Rock up about 6:30 pm as the meeting starts at 7pm sharp.

Guest speaker - the legendary Paul Caffyn - kayaker, mountaineer, climber, caver, and author.

If you are unable to attend, we hope to enable a remote connection to the meeting too, just let us know.

WCAC Membership Subs are due now for the 2020-2021 year. For payment info and to update your membership details, please go to <http://westcoastpineclub.org.nz/membership/>



Roanne Bakker topping out at the Charleston sea cliffs, on 13 June. A cold, sullen overcast morning with a rather large swell pumping spray and solid water over the bottom of the climbs.

Photo: Paul Caffyn

Editor Kōrero

Mid-year already!! Hard to believe that the year is passing so quickly but I am pleased that we are now in level 1. I've enjoyed getting back into dining out, popping into the local tavern, dancing to Shakey Ground, and catching up with friends in person. Good job NZ!

The next milestone I look forward to is opening the border with Oz where my three kids live. I expect this will happen in the very near future.

This edition of BOOTS: a quick summary.....

- An outline of our last Committee discussions.
- WCAC Club Hut - Arthurs Pass - a call for your ideas
- Obituary - Joe Brown - mountaineer
- *The Hard Years* by Joe Brown
- Joe Brown - Daily Telegraph
- Annual Hut Pass extensions
- Book review - *To the Mountains*
- Book review - *The World Beneath Their Feet*

- Book review - *The White Darkness*
- Funny BOOTS
- A Poem
- Buy/Sell
- Committee Contacts
- Gear Hire and Club Hut info

Contributions for future editions of Boots.

You are invited to contribute to whatever you would like to see in Boots.

- Items for Sale or Wanted
- Book Reviews
- Poetry and Prose
- Letters to the Editor
- Humour
- Dear Daisy / Aunt Agony / Outdoor Guru
- Anything else you would like to see included

The deadline for contributions to the next BOOTS is 31st July:

Many pictures are worth many thousand words so please send through your latest trip shots, with a few words :)

Karen Grant

BOOTS Editor

boots@westcoastalpineclub.org.nz

Committee Kōrero

AGM - planning. Usually, we hold our AGM in May but COVID-19 lockdown put paid to this so we set a June date and prepared for an online meeting while hoping that we might be able to hold it in person by then.

Climbing Wall. Still high on the agenda. This is nearing completion and promises many improvements now that the building has been earthquake strengthened. We have lost some height in places but gained interesting bulges to negotiate! It will be open soon which is fortunate now that we have cold winter days upon us. Some more volunteers to assist with running climbing wall sessions will be needed.

The Club Hut - Paul Caffyn has drawn up a plan of the hut which is to be circulated in the next edition of Boots. We are calling for ideas for future improvements. One proposal is to open up the living area to an outdoor deck. We are looking for member feedback and ideas.

WCAC Committee - nominations for committee positions are being called for now. You can nominate yourself, or someone else (with their permission of course). Current office bearers will help new members into their roles.

The roles available are:

- President
- Vice President
- Treasurer
- Secretary
- Club Captain
- General Committee

WCAC TRIPS – LET'S GET GOING AGAIN

Time to get a Trips List populated. Calling for ideas from members and people willing to coordinate activities. Club funds are available to assist with club trips.

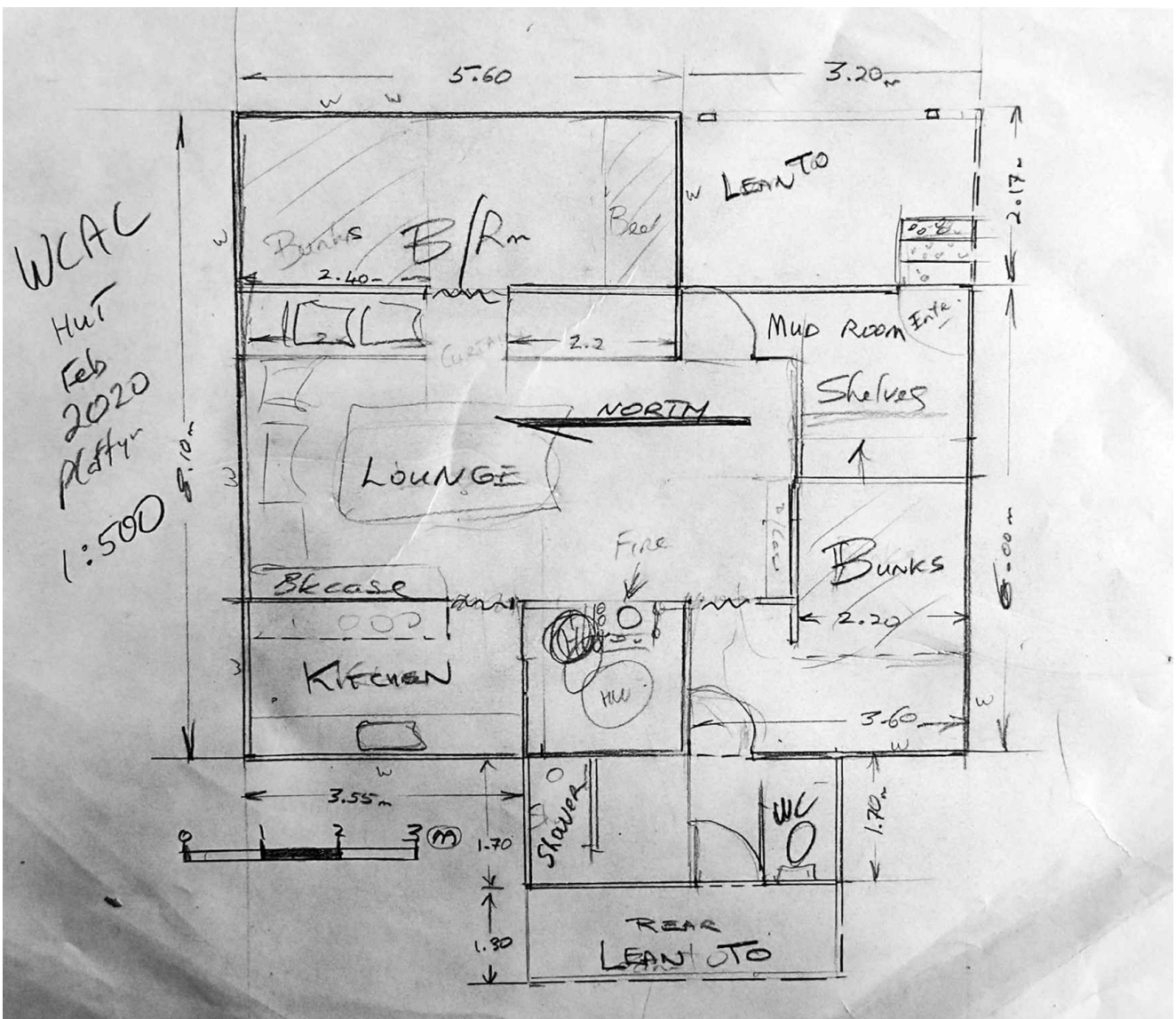
Karen Grant

WCAC Club Hut - Arthurs Pass

Our Arthurs Pass hut could do with a decent makeover, to make it warmer in winter and allow more light in all year round. The northern end of the 'lounge' could have a double glazed ranch-slider which would allow a heap more sun inside. The small kitchen is also a bit of a pain for cooking when there is a good turn out.

Have a gander at the totally accurate schematic below.....

If you have any ideas/suggestions for hut improvements, please get in touch with the committee (contacts are at the end of this edition of Boots)



Above: Plan of current WCAC hut layout. What would you like to see improved?

Schematic: Paul Caffyn

JOE BROWN - MOUNTAINEER

Sept 1930 - April 2020

Obituary by Jim Perrin

MOUNTAINEERING has a levelling tendency. Self-promotion is met with mockery. Few of its would-be heroes escape reductive scrutiny. Accident and failure are often accorded greater respect than organisation or success. Yet even the devotees of the sport would accord heroic status to one figure above all others — Joe Brown, who died peacefully in his sleep last night aged 89.

The decade that followed his return from national service to Manchester in 1950 was perhaps the most crucial in the exploration of Britain's rock outcrops and mountain crags. Brown was involved in the Rock & Ice Climbing Club, founded in 1951 by a group of Manchester climbers, and developed a partnership with Don Whillans. This was to become the most significant in modern climbing history. As a team, they were formidable: the boldness and physical strength of the slightly younger Whillans balancing Brown's inspired improvisations and innate rock-sense.

The stages for the Rock & Ice advance were the Derbyshire outcrops and the range of cliffs along the north side of the Llanberis Pass in Snowdonia. At August Bank Holiday, 1951, Brown joined forces with Whillans in an attempt on the right wall of Cenotaph Corner on Dinas Cromlech in the Llanberis Pass. Their first attempt ended in retreat as a cloudburst soaked the rock. A month later they were back, and this time succeeded on a route that was a psychological breakthrough in its acceptance of unremitting steepness and exposure, loose rock and poor protection. They called it Cemetery Gates, after a name Brown saw on the destination board of a bus as he returned through Chester that night. That October, the same pair fought their way up Vember on Clogwyn Du'r Arddu — Brown's second attempt after a near disaster two years previously — and the Rock & Ice revolution was underway.



Photo - telegraph.co.uk

The activities of this group — and Brown in particular — expanded to include the French Alps, where British climbing had scarcely advanced for 50 years. On their first visit in 1953, the Brown-Whillans team made the third ascent in a very fast time of the recent Magnone route on the West Face of the Petit Dru — then deemed the hardest rock-climb in the Alps; they went on to climb an even harder line of their own on the West Face of the Aiguille de Blaitière that very soon gained and long retained a reputation for extreme difficulty.

As a result, Brown was invited to join Charles Evans's reconnaissance expedition in 1955 to Kanchenjunga, the world's third-highest peak, and its highest unclimbed one at that time. (Brown's acceptance, and apparent refusal to press for Whillans's inclusion — something he was in no position to do — was seen by the latter as a betrayal, and the two men, who had never been close friends, climbed less frequently together thereafter.) The climb was far harder, more arduous and committing than the 1953 ascent of Everest. Brown led the final difficult rock pitch to the top (minus four feet, as an undertaking had been given to the King of Nepal not to tread the actual summit of this holy mountain). His fame thereafter was assured. He followed up this success in 1956 with the first ascent of the Mustagh Tower, a 24,000-foot rock spire in the Karakoram that had rejoiced for over 60 years in the reputation of "Nature's last stronghold — the most inaccessible of all great peaks".

By 1956 Brown had established himself as the most considerable all-round mountaineer in the history of the sport in Britain. His first ascents on Pennine, Welsh, Cumbrian and Scottish rock had significantly advanced the concept of the climbable; in the Alps and the Himalayas, his record was no less impressive. He continued to climb right through to his old age, and the list of his achievements grew longer with the years. His last recorded new climbs, on Welsh slate and in the Anti-Atlas of Morocco, were accomplished in his late seventies. But after those two great Himalayan ascents of the mid-1950s, his climbing involvement was more relaxed. In that lies a key to his longevity in the sport.

He married in 1957. The horizons of his activity broadened. He began to be in demand for television work, where his flinty,

humorous commentary, phlegmatic even when in extremis, acted as anchor to outside broadcasts from places as far apart as Iran's Valley of the Assassins, Welsh sea and mountain cliffs, Alpine aiguilles, Scottish sea-stacks and a wintry Ben Nevis. For one programme in the 1980s on the Old Man of Hoy, he climbed with his younger daughter Zoë, whose character came over as amused and engaging as his own. He even made a quirky series of television shorts about fishing in inaccessible places, and acted as Jeremy Irons's double in the waterfall sequences of *The Mission* (the fact that Irons towered over him by almost a foot was concealed by careful camerawork). There was a measured wit and gravity and a light mocking touch about his screen persona that held true in all the relationships of his life.

He instructed for a time at White Hall Outdoor Pursuits Centre in Derbyshire, where he found time to master canoeing. He loved to fish quiet rivers, alone or with close friends. He had new phases of intense exploratory activity on British rock. In the early 1960s, he combed the secretive valleys of southern Snowdonia for small, steep crags on which he sketched out the early masterpieces of climbing's modern age: Vector, Pellagra, Dwm, Hardd, Ferdinand. In 1965 he moved to Llanberis and opened the first of a small chain of outdoor-equipment retailers. He had significant climbing partnerships with men of younger generations. With Peter Crew he developed the awesome sea-cliffs of Gogarth and South Stack, producing an extraordinary series of routes: Mousetrap, Mammoth, Red Wall, Doppelganger, Wendigo. He continued to probe their intimacies to produce classic and teasing climbs long after Crew had failed to keep pace with his continued zeal. He made significant ascents of difficult peaks in the Andes. In the Himalayas he forged an alliance with Mo Anthoine and enjoyed trip after light-hearted trip — many of them unsuccessful in reaching their objectives, and that did not matter to him one iota — to difficult peaks in Garhwal and elsewhere. Even in his sixties, he took part in an expedition dogged by bad weather to Everest's then unclimbed North-north-east Ridge.



Photo: Wikipedia

Brown was born in Ardwick, Manchester, the seventh and last child of a poor Roman Catholic family. His father died when his youngest son was eight months old. Thereafter, his mother provided for the family through cleaning work and taking in laundry. He left school at 14 without qualifications to work for a jobbing builder. From Manchester the Pennine moors were no more than a bus-ride away: "By my 12th birthday I knew that going into the country was more satisfying to me than anything else," Brown wrote. At first, it was child's play, then it gravitated to mine exploration in the abandoned copper workings at Alderley Edge and pot-holing in the White Peak. Inevitably, the progression was to climbing. For Brown, this began among the arctic conditions of early 1947 in hobnailed boots at Kinder Downfall, above Hayfield in Derbyshire.

The rapidity with which Brown became perhaps the most significant figure in British climbing history was astounding. Within weeks this short, slight 16-year-old had begun to lead mountain rock-climbs at the highest contemporary standard. His native talent needed an educated and organizational ability to lead it on to fame and achievement. He found it through a chance meeting at Kinder Downfall in the spring of 1947 with Merrick "Slim" Sorrell.

Sorrell, three years older than Brown, was a pipe-fitter from Stockport whose solid and knowledgeable company underpinned the first phase of Brown's pioneering on rock. That their ability was notably higher than the prevailing standards of the day was established on a visit to North Wales. They had viewed the climb known as Lot's Groove on the cliffs of Glyder Fach — alleged to be one of the harder climbs in Wales. Two well-known climbers told them that it was only to be tried after an initial ascent on a top-rope and the consumption of a bar of chocolate: "Having no bar of chocolate we dispensed with a top-rope inspection and climbed the route on sight. We couldn't understand what all the fuss was about." On the same holiday, Brown made an ascent of the Suicide Wall in Cwm Idwal — undoubtedly the hardest climb of its time in Britain. "I didn't find it too bad," he told me many years later. By the summer of 1948, having mastered the most difficult of the existing climbs, he began turning out his own repertoire.

Initially, these climbs were on Derbyshire and Yorkshire gritstone edges — brutally steep outcrops of abrasive rock in the ascent of which Brown displayed a suavely rhythmical and relaxed genius. His ability was now bolstered by being at the centre of a

group of climbers from the Manchester and Derby areas, the Valkyrie Club. On crags like Stanage and Froggatt Edges, Wimberry Rocks and Dovestones, the routes that marked British rock-climbing's post-war revolution and were to bring it in line with pre-war continental standards were forged. Long-standing problems feared and revered by the sport's elders were vanquished beneath the insouciant plimsolls of a ragged and humorous 17-year-old youth. As a young climber myself in Manchester at the start of the 1960s, I was intensely aware of his presence and how much he had achieved by then. With all the other greats of my time, I could understand how they climbed: fitness, physique, supple gymnasticism or sheer application. With Brown, there was something else at work.

He was quite short, not heavily built, his muscles corded rather than developed, his movement smooth and deliberate. When I climbed with him, sometimes I would watch the way he made a move, copy it when I came to that point, and his way, that he had seen instantly, would be the least obvious and most immediately right. He was climbing's supreme craftsman, unerringly aware of the medium. That instinctual rock-sense never entirely left him. And with him too came a character generous, playful and straightforward. His mind may not have been academically trained, but he was sharp, informed, argumentative, and I think very wise. He loved the contest, be it physical or intellectual; he loved to wrestle.

Once, after an exceptionally fissile first ascent on the Pembrokeshire sea-cliffs, he had led the marginally safer top pitch and I followed to find him sitting on the cliff-edge with nothing more than his feet down two rabbit holes for a belay, smiling dangerously. He pulled me to the ground and boxed me about the ears for risking his life and limb, scolding me for what he called the loosest route he had ever done. But he was laughing, laughing, and we ran back in perfect humour across the unmarked beach, the cliff crumbling slowly behind us in the western light, the waves rolling against it. He needed the simplicity of that conflict, and the character that emerged from it was perhaps the sweetest I ever knew, still generous and endearingly funny as he endured with dignity and humour the ill health of his final years.

(m. Valerie, 1957, who survives him, as do their two daughters, Helen and Zoe, and four grandchildren.)
Joe Brown, mountaineer, born 29 September 1930; died 15 April, 2020

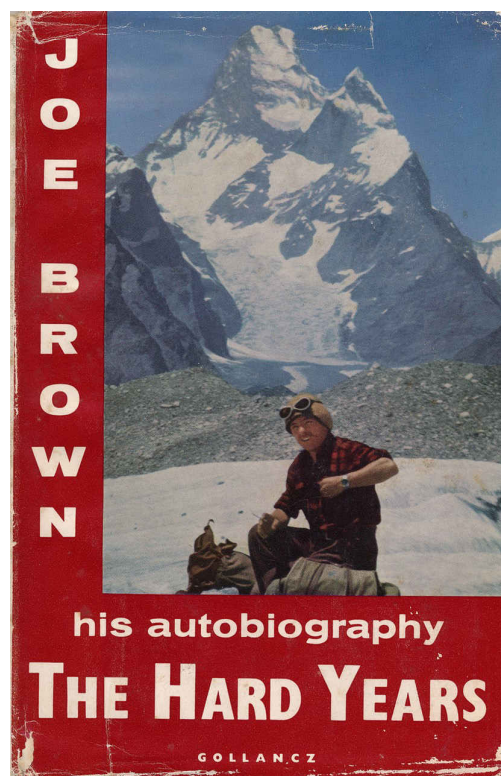
THE HARD YEARS

Joe Brown's "*The Hard Years*", was the second climbing book that Paul Caffyn bought.

Paul notes that back in the 1950s and '60s, there was no email and there were no websites.

Climbers' reputations were passed on via pub chat after a day's climbing. Word of mouth descriptions of a legendary climber like Joe could gain a bit of exaggeration from pub to pub with each retelling of Joe's ability.

Nevertheless, Joe was so influential on a worldwide generation of rock climbers and mountaineers that he, along with Don Whillans, broke the mould of British climbers being solely from the 'Upper Class'.





A scan of what I think is the best photo
in Joe's book.

He did have a good sense of humour.
- Paul Caffyn

1. "has bandy legs, teeth like tombstones and hands like bunches of
bananas"

Outstanding rock climber whose fame was assured when he made the first ascent of Kanchenjunga

JOE BROWN, who has died aged 88, was by common consent the greatest British all-round climber of the 20th century. Brown was born on September 26 1930, the seventh and last child of a poor Catholic family in a tiny terraced house at Ardwick in Manchester. His father had worked as builder and sailor, but died of gangrene after an accident on board ship when Joe was eight months old. Joe's mother provided for the family by cleaning and taking in laundry. A fatherless upbringing and a hard but happy home life encouraged me to fend for myself," Joe noted in his 1967 autobiography, *The Hard Years*. He left school at 14 without qualifications to work for a plumber and jobbing builder.

But the Pennine moors were no more than a cheap bus-ride away. "By my 12th birthday I knew that going into the country was more satisfying to me than anything else," he wrote.

From rope swings across gorges, the damming of streams and building fires, he and his friends gravitated to potholing and exploring old mineshafts at Alderley Edge with ropes taken from roadmen's huts. Brown began climbing in the arctic conditions of early 1947 on the rocks of Kinder Downfall, above Hayfield in Derbyshire. "In hobnailed boots and with cumbersome rucksacks on our backs the ascent was distinctly awkward. I climbed the rocks beside the waterfall with a heavy brewer's rope coiled round my shoulders. On reaching the top I threw it down for my companions to follow with its protection."

The rapidly with which Brown went on from that early encounter to become the most significant figure in British climbing was astounding. Within weeks the short, slight, impoverished 16-year-old had begun to lead mountain rock-climbs at the highest contemporary standard.

In the spring of 1947 he had a chance meeting at Kinder Downfall with Merrick "Slim" Sorrell, a pipe-fitter from Stockport who communicated his climbing skills to his young friend. On a visit to North Wales they attempted Lot's Grove on the cliffs of Glyder Fach, a climb which, they had been told, was only to be tried after an initial ascent on a top-rope (ie, a rope put in place beforehand) and the consumption of a bar of chocolate: "Having no bar of chocolate we dispensed with a top-rope inspection and climbed the route on sight. We couldn't understand what all the fuss was about," Brown recalled.

On the same holiday Brown made an ascent of the "Suicide Wall" in Cwm Idwal – the hardest climb of its time in Britain. "I didn't find it too bad," he said later. By the summer of 1948 he began creating his own climbs. Initially these were on the Derbyshire and Yorkshire grit stone edges – brutally steep outcrops of abrasive rock in the ascent of which Brown displayed a rhythmical and relaxed genius. On crags like Stanage and Froggatt Edges, Wimberry Rocks



Brown with Julie Collins in Snowdonia in 1967 and, below, on the sea-cliff of Craig Gogarth at Holyhead

and Dovestones, he forged routes that marked British rock-climbing's post-war revolution

Once, climbing in wet conditions on the most forbidding of Welsh cliffs, Clogwyn Du'r Arddu, two strands of Clogwyn Du'r Arddu, two strands of Brown's hemp rope sawed through as it rubbed down a vertical edge after he fell. A further potentially fatal fall was only prevented by friends pouncing on him before he plunged from the ledge on which he had landed.

After two years' National Service, in 1951 Brown and a group of climbers living near his home in south Manchester, formed the Rock & Ice Climbing Club. With fellow member Don Willians Brown

formed a partnership which, while never exclusive or even particularly amicable, was to become the most significant in modern climbing history; Willians's boldness and physical strength balanced Brown's inspired improvisations and innate rock-sense.

On August Bank Holiday 1951 Brown and Willians decided to attempt a tenuous line of cracks up the right wall of the great feature of Cenotaph Corner on Dinas Cromlech in the Llanberis Pass, Snowdonia. Their first attempt ended in retreat as a cloudburst soaked the rock. A month later they were back, and this time succeeded. "All the way up, little flakes of rock broke off when we pulled or stood on them," Brown recalled.

They called the route Cemetery Gates, after a name Brown saw on the destination board of a bus as he returned through Chester that night. It still demands respect.

Brown had attempted the 120ft-high vertical gash of Cenotaph Corner itself earlier the same year. From near the top he had dropped a hammer held between his teeth on to his second's head, and had had to climb down unprotected to minister first aid. He subsequently left the climb alone for a period before succeeding on it the following year.

A fortnight after the success on Cemetery Gates, Brown and Willians fought their way up the line on Clogwyn Du'r Arddu, the attempt on which had so nearly ended in disaster two years previously.

They did not confine their activities to Britain. In the French Alps, on their first visit in 1953, the Brown-Willians team made the third ascent in a very fast time of the recent Magoone route on the West Face of the Petit Dru – then deemed the hardest rock-climb in the Alps. They then went on to climb an even harder line of their own on the West Face of the Aiguille de Bliatière

that has retained a reputation for extreme difficulty.

This activity resulted in an invitation for Brown to accompany Charles Evans's reconnaissance expedition in 1955 to Kanchenjunga, the world's third highest peak and its highest unclimbed one at that time.

The climb was in many ways more arduous than that of Everest, which had been accomplished two years earlier by a far larger team.

Brown led the final ascent to the top (minus four feet, as an undertaking had been given to the King of Nepal not to tread the actual summit of the holy mountain). His fame thereafter was assured.

He followed up in 1956 with the first ascent of the Mustagh Tower, a 24,000ft rock spire in the Karakoram known as "Nature's last stronghold". It was a climb of extreme difficulty, the most serious undertaken in the Himalaya up to that time.

Like the ascent of Kanchenjunga, it was accomplished in poor conditions by an expedition tiny by the conventions of the day.

By 1956 Brown had established himself as the greatest all-round mountaineer in the history of the sport in Britain. He continued to climb into old age, albeit at a slightly more relaxed pace.

He found himself in demand for television work, in which, while climbing, his humorous, phlegmatic commentary anchored outside broadcasts from places as far apart as Iran's Valley of the Assassins, sea and mountain cliffs in Wales, Alpine aiguilles, Scottish sea-stacks and a wintry Ben Nevis.

For one programme in the 1980s on the Old Man of Hoy he climbed with his younger daughter Zoe. He even made a quirky series of television shorts about fishing in inaccessible places, and acted as Jeremy Irons's double in the waterfall sequences of *The Mission* (1986).

Brown instructed for a time at White Hall Outdoor Pursuits Centre in Derbyshire, where he found time to master other sports like canoeing. He loved to fish quiet rivers. In the early 1960s he climbed crags in the valleys of southern Snowdonia. In 1965 he moved to Llanberis and opened the first of a small chain of outdoor equipment shops.

With Peter Crew he developed the sea-cliffs of Gogarth and South Stack, producing an extraordinary series of routes: Mousetrapp, Mammoth, Red Wall, Doppelganger, Wendigo. He made significant ascents of difficult peaks in the Andes. In the Himalayas he forged an alliance with Mo Anthoine and enjoyed trips to difficult peaks in Garhwal and elsewhere. In his sixties he took part in an expedition dogged by bad weather to Everest's then-unclimbed North-north-east Ridge.

He was appointed MBE, advanced to CBE in 2011.

In 1957 he married Valerie Gray, with whom he had two daughters.

Joe Brown, born September 26 1930, died April 15 2020



Annual Hut Pass extensions

– A note from FMC

Annual Hut Pass extensions

All huts on public conservation land are currently closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Customers who have purchased Annual Hut Passes are eligible for extensions on their pass. Passes will be extended by the length of time that huts remain closed.

For example, if an annual pass had 3 months until expiry from 23 March 2020 (the date backcountry huts closed), the customer may request a new expiry date of 3 months from the date that the huts are opened again.

To access the extension, customers will need to take their pass to a DOC Visitor Centre, where they will be issued with a new pass with an extended expiry date. This will only be possible once the COVID-19 Alert Level has reduced and Visitor Centres have reopened.



Photo: Paul Caffyn
Roanne leading on Weka Wall

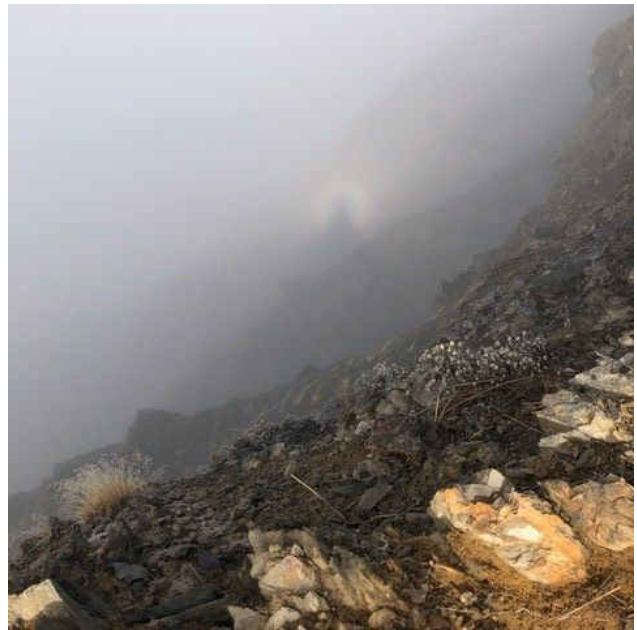


Photo: Roanne Bakker
Spectre of the Brocken whilst climbing Avalanche Peak

TO THE MOUNTAINS

A collection of New Zealand

alpine writing

Laurence Fearnley and Paul Hersey

Otago University Press - 2018

Book review by Di Hooper:



In the absence of being able to report on any overnight expeditions for the months of late March and most of April, due to you know what, a book review for Boots seems an appropriate report. The four weeks of lockdown was a good time to read. This recent publication is the best in every respect, and if you spend some money on it, you will not be disappointed. It's a hardback worthy of keeping for decades and will be selected by your kids when the time comes for them to investigate the books you once cherished.

Over eighty New Zealand writings and excerpts have been selected for this book and they cover a century or more of New Zealand alpinism, from the relatively obscure to the famous, (e.g. de Beer to du Faur) and covering everything from overseas expedition writing to accounts of days out in our local wops (Dingle to Pascoe). The diverse selection also ranges from writings by the hugely capable but understated Peter Graham, who summited so many virgin peaks, to those who climbed in the latter part of the twentieth century, tragically losing their lives in the mountains such as internationally acclaimed Karen McNeill, Jill Tremain and also Mark Whetu.

The excerpts are organised into four sections – 'Approach,' 'Climb,' 'Epic,' and 'Reflection.' Within this framework, there is everything you would want to read. Looking over the list of contributors, it is easy to feel a great pride in the mountaineering achievements of such copious numbers of New Zealanders over the last century. The book also brings us up to date, with pieces from our most current mountaineers who are not only continuing the traditions but also smashing them. Reading Pat Deavoll, and Lydia Bradey for example,

is always a blast.

If you are a busy person, compendiums are perfect for a quick read while eating lunch at the table, or a night-time read before sleep. Each selected read only increases the desire for the contributor's original book. Before picking up 'To the Mountains,' I had just finished reading Aat Vevorn's 'Mountain Solitudes' and was pleased to find that a chapter from his former book 'Above the Snowline' had been included. I had given away my Deavoll book, so I was pleased to be able to read again, a few pages from her 'Winds from a Distant Summit.' A friend had lent me the DVD Ocean to Sky so after watching it, reading a couple of Hillary chapters in the book was a great follow up.

Most pleasing about this book was the inclusion of some of our mountain heroes who seem to be less known, showing that Fearnley and Hersey knew their stuff when putting together the collection. James Dennistoun's explorations of the Rangitata country, and Allan Uren's remarkable climbing come to mind. If some of the contributors mostly lived in the last century, (e.g. Scott Gilkison, Norm Hardie or Bernard Head) there are contemporary writings to read, such as Steve Hart Ross Cullen, and Penny Goddard.

This publication has already become a classic, but more importantly, it is just a very good read.

Title: *The World Beneath Their Feet*

Sub-title: *The British, the Americans, the Nazis and the Mountaineering Race to Summit the Himalayas*

Author: Ellsworth, Scott

Published: 2020, John Murray, UK

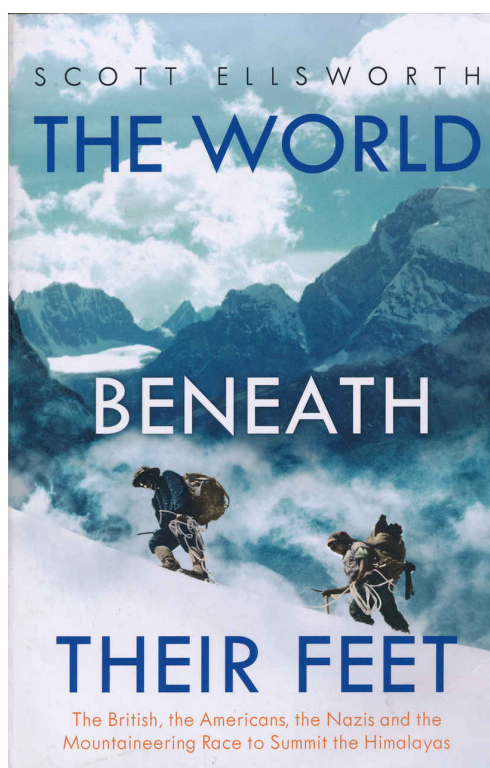
ISBN: 978-1-529-30719-1

Contents: softcover, 393 pp, one map, chapter notes, index. No photos

Price: NZ\$ 34.00 Warehouse

(a hardcover edition is available from Book Depository for NZ \$43.71)

Reviewed by Paul Caffyn



On a last-minute panic book buy before lockdown, I found this title in the new bookshelves at our local Red Shed. The rear cover blurb describes an era of mountaineering in the Himalayas between 1931 and 1953 with a deadly race between several nations to first ascend the highest mountains in the world. Scott Ellsworth backgrounds the politics, both climbing and national, behind the Himalayan expeditions. He has delved into personal letters and diaries, mountaineering club journals, books, and Sherpa interviews to lift his story way above the existing sanitized accounts.

Although I have a fair number of those historical accounts, first published between 1931 and 1953, this book provides a refreshing new view of their highlights and lowlights, with a mix of quoted material and the author's own perspective. It starts with news of a 1931 German expedition to attempt Kanchenjunga which ruffled a few feathers at the Alpine Club HQ in London for, up to that year, mountaineering in the Himalayas had been very much the exclusive domain of British climbers, especially Everest which was still awaiting a first ascent.

Then year by year from 1931 to 1939, Scot Ellsworth traces the various expeditions which 'race' to conquer the un-climbed 8,000 metre peaks, with a gap for the war years, before the 1950 – 53 climbs are described. Britain had laid claim to Mt Everest following their three early 1920s expeditions, while other big nations laid siege to 'their' mountains; the Americans to K2, the French to Annapurna and the Germans to Nanga Parbat.

Scott Ellsworth contrasts expedition styles, from the big-budget, tons of supplies carried to base camps by hundreds of porters, no expense spared, to the 'back of an envelope' minimalist budget trips. A classic example of the latter in 1934 was the first reconnaissance, by Eric Shipton, Bill Tilman, and three Sherpas, up a deep gorge known as Rishi Nala, to gain access to the Nanda Devi Sanctuary. Passang, Kusang and Ang Tharkay were provided with 'Everest-style windproof suits' as well as a mix of other miscellaneous items that Shipton had bludged from friends or 'found buried in the back of his closet back home in London'. Tilman and Shipton each spent £143.10 on that wee trip while the Everest expedition of 1933 spent £11,000.

That 1934 Nanda Devi Sanctuary mission was really the first when the broad class gap between porters and sahibs began to fray at the edges with Sherpas no longer treated as load-carrying servants but 'fellow mountaineers and companions'. Ellsworth quotes from Shipton's classic account *Nanda Devi* (1936) of the Sherpa's sense of humour:

'Any minor misfortune, such as breaking a pipe or burning a hole in drying socks, would bring the house down, and once when I sat on my snow glasses and held up the result for Passang's inspection, I thought he would have hysterics.'

A chapter titled 'Yogis and Yak Meat' relates the amazing story of Maurice Wilson, an Englishman with no prior flying or climbing experience, who decided to fly out to India and make a first ascent of Mt Everest - solo. He purchased a 2nd-hand Tiger Moth in 1933, learned to fly, and navigated by just map, watch and compass, while having to dodge the British authorities who were determined to stop him, and flew out to India. Disguised as a Tibetan monk, he slipped out of Darjeeling by night and trekked with four Sherpas into Tibet where he eventually reached the East Rongbuk Glacier and the base campsite used by the 1920s British expeditions. Maurice Wilson made three attempts to reach North Col - his body was found the following year along with his diary. Frank Smythe is quoted as writing, 'It wasn't mountaineering, yet it was magnificent.'

One of the most compelling chapters, 'The New Emersonians', is of a 1932 American expedition to climb a remote peak in Tibet which, according to stories written for *National Geographic Magazine*, was possibly higher than Everest. Starting out as a nine-person team, their travel to the mountain was caught up in the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, Japanese shelling of Shanghai, and fraught with transport difficulties. The team was winnowed down to four before they finally gained permission to attempt the climb. On 28 October 1932 Terris Moore and Dick Burdsall topped out on Minya Konka, the 2nd highest mountain ever climbed. An outstanding achievement by a party of four college boys from eastern USA.

The last two chapters, 'The Brightness of Their Rising' and 'Glory Strength and Decency' provide the background and leadership controversy involved with the successful 1953 Everest expedition, and describe the corker morning when Ed and Tenzing stepped onto the summit of Everest.

I found not only the political chicanery behind the choice of expedition leaders and choice of climbers intriguing, particularly with Germany in the 1930s, but also the political background festering in the background, again with Germany and some shocking stories in the lead up to WW2.

The tail end of the book includes lists with:

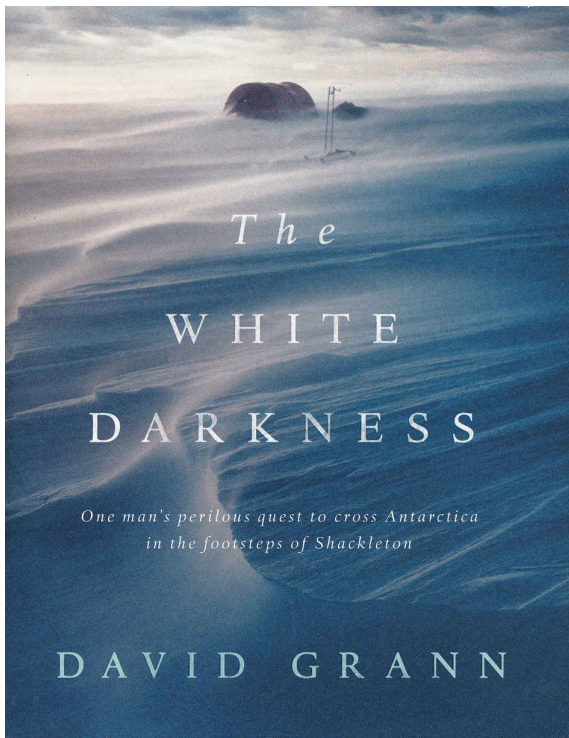
- *The Climbers*
- *The Expeditions* (year by year)
- *A Glossary of Mountaineering Terms*
- *Notes*
- *Index*

Individual chapter notes (pages 343 – 379) list the sources researched for compiling the book, classic books on the big international expeditions, mountaineering journals, letters, and personal diaries.

There are some corker quotes. After Bill Tilman and Noel Odell achieved their first ascent of Nanda Devi on 29 August 1936, they were back in their tent, drinking jorum after jorum of tea:

'There was but a pinch left and we squandered it recklessly, saving the leaves for the morning.' Classic Tilman understatement. (And yes, I had to google what a jorum is).

For an insight into the golden age of mountaineering in the Himalayas, this book is a bit of a treasure trove. The downside of this trade paperback edition is that it is devoid of photographs and includes just one basic map.



Sub-title: *One man's perilous quest to cross Antarctica in the footsteps of Shackleton*

Author: Grann, David

Published: 2018, Simon & Schuster, Sydney

ISBN: 978-1-4711-7802-3

Contents: hardcover, 146 pp, d/j, map, colour, and b&w photos throughout.

Price: NZ\$ 26.91 Book Depository, UK

Review by Paul Caffyn

In recent years there have been a host of new publications about adventurers undertaking arduous man-hauling expeditions on the great Southern Ice, following either in the path of Scott or Shackleton, while one classic describes a crossing of Antarctica following the lead of Roald Amundsen by using dog teams. Those who are less dogmatic of doing it the historical hard British way - by man (or woman) hauling - have traveled on skis and harnessed the wind by using parafoils. Then there are books about those wealthy buggers who claim to have reached both the North and South poles, but yet they have been flown in and flown out, to do just that last degree of latitude to each pole. There have been re-creations of the early British trips, in period costume, with films and books written about the filming.

But I will digress to what sparked my interest in Antarctic books. In 1985 I was lent a book titled *This Accursed Land* by Leonard Bickel (1977). This is the story of Douglas Mawson's Australian Antarctic Expedition from 1911 to 1913. Mawson had earlier experience of man-hauling to the South Magnetic Pole under an expedition that was led by Shackleton. Learning from that grueling drag, his own expedition used dog teams. It was Mawson's three-man exploration trip that was the heart of Bickel's book; Belgrave Ninnis went down a monster crevasse with his dog team, and then several weeks later on the homeward leg, Xavier Mertz died, most likely from overdoing a Vitamin A rich diet including dog liver. Mawson was not in much better shape; his paltry diet led to scurvy, as he too had been eating the dog livers. Funny how things stick in your mind, like the soles of Mawson's feet falling off and his having to tie them back in place, then making a primitive set of crampons using the screws from his theodolite case. To top it all, he staggered finally back in sight of the expedition base only to see the departing support vessel steaming north on the horizon.

It was this book that started the trouble; the Australian Frank Hurley was the photographer on Mawson's expedition and then he joined the disastrous Shackleton led the trans-Antarctic expedition. It was Hurley who against Shackleton's order, dived into a submerged cabin of the ice-crushed *Endurance* to salvage some of his classic glass negatives that have provided the most evocative photos of that expedition. They both went on to write the classic tomes of Antarctic Exploration, like Mawson's two-volume *The Home of the Blizzard* (1915) and Hurley's *Argonauts of the South* (1925).

Needless to say, I now have a modest collection of first editions of the most well-known Antarctic exploration classics. But when this delightful hardback *The White Darkness* said 'buy me' when I saw it in the bargain bin at the Greymouth Warehouse.

As a school kid in England, Henry Worsley wasn't much interested in classroom studies but a library-copy of *The Heart of the Antarctic* led to his life-long fascination with Ernest Shackleton. Henry's army father was often posted overseas so Henry went to a Kent boarding school. In 1978 he joined the army. Rising through the ranks of his father's old regiment, he began to revisit the stories of Shackleton, which he now considered that were no longer romantic tales: 'I became mesmerized by the extraordinary levels of hardship these men were prepared to endure.'

In his 2011 book *In Shackleton's Footsteps*, Frank noted: 'Shackleton had become more than a hero to me. I looked up him as a mentor. I was going into the business of leading men and as a nineteen-year-old, new to his trade, I believed that there was no better example to follow than his.'

In November 2008, Frank set off with two mates who also had family links with members of Shackleton's expeditions. They reached

the South Pole after 65 days and 820 miles of man-hauling. Henry wrote a rather good narrative of this man-hauling journey, titled *In Shackleton's Footsteps* (2011), which was printed in both hardback and softcover editions.

In 2015, Henry decided to attempt a solo unsupported crossing of Antarctica, aiming to complete a trip that his hero Shackleton never got to start, when the expedition vessel *Endurance* was nipped in the ice. If Shackleton had listened to the advice of his boat's skipper, Frank Worsley, and dropped the crossing party off when the ice allowed closure to the ice shelf, there would have been no vessel crushed and the epic drama for the boat's crew and expedition team. Shackleton insisted on heading south, but after only 11 miles, *Endurance* was nipped. All the men eventually survived after Frank Worsley navigated the ship's lifeboat *James Caird* to the whaling station at South Georgia. Sadly all the lovely sled dogs and Mrs Chippy, the ship's cat, were burdens to feed on the ice and were killed.

So a first trans-Antarctic crossing remained uncompleted. There were many plans, even Gino Watkins was planning a crossing in the 1930s before he went missing in East Greenland in 1933 and there many attempts at unsupported crossings via the South Pole. Mike Stroud (*Shadows on the Wasteland* 1993) and Ranulph Fiennes (*Mind Over Matter* 1993) got close so close to the ice shelf edge but their wasted bodies led to a fixed-wing pick up so close to crossing completion.

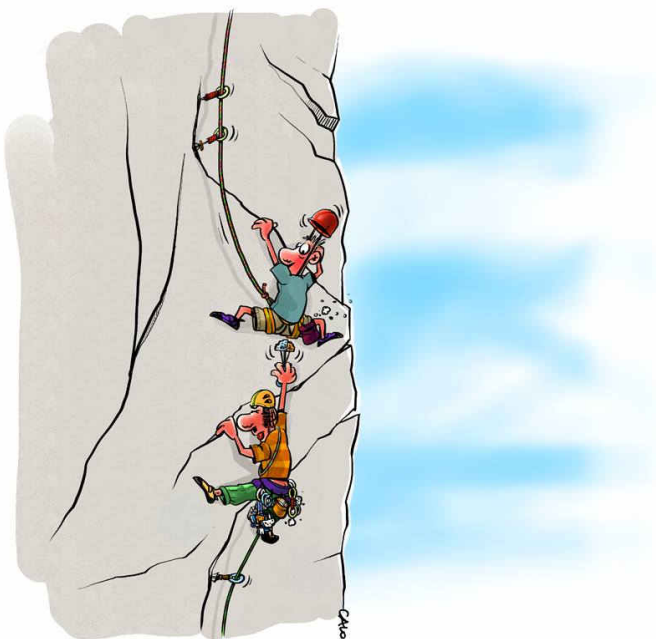
Although a magnificent, solo unsupported crossing was achieved by Borge Ousland in 1996-97, Henry Worsley has determined to complete the crossing planned by his hero Ernest Shackleton. At the ripe old age of 55, married with two grown-up kids, he set off on 13 November 2015 on his 'perilous quest' to cross Antarctica, solo and unsupported.

The White Darkness author, David Grann, has compiled a delightful compilation of text, historic black and white photos with colour photos of Henry's South Pole trip and his attempt at the full crossing.

I am not going to divulge the end of the book but if you would like an introduction to historic British Antarctic expeditions and one man's obsession to complete a crossing planned by his hero Ernest Shackleton, this book is worth hunting for.



FUNNY BOOTS





EVERYONE'S A POET - DON'T YOU KNOW IT?

THE BARD

Today Paul Caffyn and Karen Grant
Conquered The Bard's traverse
With gritted teeth and whitened knuckles,
Both hoped it could get no worse

But with three pitches still to go,
Our hearts were filled with dread
Our furrowed brows showed our woes,
The worry we'd not be fed

For surely now the hour was late,
The Natimuk pub would soon be shut
With empty bellies, the fear of no dinner
Far worse than a stab in our guts

Our minds now focussed,
Our efforts redoubled
Our final three pitches
Were not any trouble

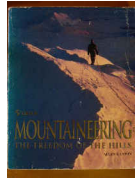
High five at the top
Then down chains we went
Threw gear in our van,
Our time here was spent

Over steak, chips and salad
We agreed "That was hard"
Raised our glasses and said
"To the buggers who first led The Bard"

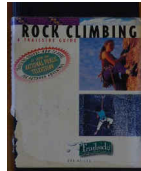
BUY / SELL

- Fisher & Paykel upright washing machine. In good nick, has been in storage and not needed - txt or ph 027 343 7954

- Mountaineering 5th Ed - The Freedom of the Hills \$15 - ph/txt 027 768 6282



- Rock Climbing - a Trailside Guide - Don Melloe \$5 - ph/txt 027 768 6282



General Club Information

Current Club Officers 2019-2020

President: Jason Blair
president@westcoastalpineclub.org.nz

Vice-president: Karen Grant
vicepresident@westcoastalpineclub.org.nz

Secretary: Brittany Jenkins
admin@westcoastalpineclub.org.nz

Treasurer: Jess Curtis
treasurer@westcoastalpineclub.org.nz

Club Captain: Ramesh Tiwari
trips@westcoastalpineclub.org.nz

General Committee

Adele Reweti; John Burrell; Samara Martin; Tate Bradley; Holly Lindsay; Paul Caffyn; Annelies Bierings.

The committee meet approximately every 6 weeks. Any club member is welcome to attend. Committee minutes will be made available to club members once approved by the committee.

BOOTS Editor

Karen Grant boots@westcoastalpineclub.org.nz

Gear Hire

The WCAC gear is usually housed at the Climbing Wall (the old Civic Centre) and accessed during the scheduled Tuesday climbing sessions (6:30pm to 8:30pm). These climbing sessions have been on hold while the building has been earthquake strengthened. Until climbing sessions resume, please contact Jase Blair to organise gear hire.

We have ice axes, crampons, helmets, harnesses, avalanche kits, snow shovels, bouldering mats, a club Personal Locator Beacon

(PLB) and more.

The rates are very reasonable and we certainly want you to be safe out there.



Photo: Jason Blair

ARTHUR'S PASS - WEST COAST ALPINE CLUB HUT

We have a hut in Brake Hill Road. There's plenty of room for multiple groups to stay and be convivial. It's got a good bit of history to go with it and has had a lot of work put in by past members to maintain and improve it. Check out the new carpet and lino. If there are any tradies out there in the club, please let us know; we can always use your help.

Staying at the HUT:

For the code please contact a committee member prior to heading up. We do change the code and will let the club members know when we have changed it.

The Hut is available to members and approved non-members (eg. former members, friends, and other tramping clubs, etc). To ensure fair use of the hut for all, those wishing to stay longer than 5 nights must get permission from a club officer first.

It is possible to book the hut for your exclusive use by applying to the Committee in advance and paying a deposit. This is then advertised to all members.

A fire warden must be appointed for the duration of your stay (as per our Fire Permit) and any problems at the Hut, eg. with plumbing, should be reported promptly to a committee member. Before leaving Hut users should organise the method of fee payment, sign the Hut Log Book, and ensure the Hut is secure.

Current Rates:

Members: \$8 per for adults and \$4 for school children

Non Members: \$16 per for adults and \$8 for school children

Hut fees should be paid promptly in one of three ways

- Put money in Hut Box (with names of those who stayed and when)
- Mail your payment to the WCAC Treasurer at PO Box 136 Greymouth, 7840
- Pay by direct credit to the Club Account at ASB Greymouth. Account No. 12 3168 0044967 02

Any questions, comments, or queries just contact one of the committee officers on the above contact list.

And that's it for now.

Keep in touch and send your pics and news through to me whenever you have a spare moment.

boots@westcoastalpineclub.org.nz

Ka kite āno,

Karen Grant, *Boots* Editor

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www.westcoastalpineclub.org.nz

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