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### ***Section 'Meeting'***

This month's social get together is **7:30pm on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> September at Little George**

*Have an event that you want to promote or review, a trip report or any section or club news? Get in touch with Michael Donovan, or post something directly to the Section's Slack channel #newsletter.*

***In this month's newsletter, Shane Coulston reports a trip up Ngauruhoe, Michael Donovan gives a brief report on the recent Snowcraft Intermediate Course, and there are two important announcements regarding the closure of Bayleys Road Crag and Pakeho Crag.***

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# Mt Ngauruhoe Midnight Mission

by Shane Coulston

It all began with a few guys in my climbing circle having birthdays over the space of a couple weeks. It was Brian's idea to try for a group mission that goes far and above the average weekend spent hanging out at a local climbing crag. We were to keep our fingers, toes and eyes crossed hoping for clear weather on the weekend of the 20<sup>th</sup> August as this was to be close to a full moon and the Tongariro crossing was our target. As it turned out due, to unfortunate circumstances Brian wasn't able to come out with us. The objective also shifted to climbing Ngauruhoe as it meant some alpinists in the group got a good chance to stretch their legs. I'd climbed Ngauruhoe once in the summer time when I was 13 with my far fitter grandfather reaching the top with enough time to make a cup of tea before I managed to drag my sorry self-up there. My only experience with snow was on the Snowcraft Beginner course last year, or with a fibreglass plank strapped to my feet so I was quite keen to experience something new, and at night I wasn't fully sure what to expect.

On Friday after work we shot down to National Park, all seven of us leaving the Mangatepopo car park at 11pm and arriving at the hut not long later where we then ditched our bulky packs, opting for smaller more essentials based summit packs. Amy's knee wouldn't let her carry on any further than here so leaving her at the hut we carried on to the bottom of the Devil's Staircase. At this point my optimism was fading; we'd been watching a shroud of cloud around the summit of Ngauruhoe and instead of it retreating as first anticipated it was growing rather overcast around us. With my limited experience in the mountains I wasn't too happy with testing theoretical survival strategies and thought the others might bail out. We played a few games of 'miss the snowball with the ice axe' and posed for a few photos, the time was now 12.30am.

Michelle and Rob headed back to the hut while Paul, Cam, Drew and I picked the nicest looking snow chute and practiced our step kicking up it. The cloud hadn't lifted and it was snowing gently, despite this we still didn't need lights to see as the snow seemed to glow, everything was in varying shades of black and white, much like an old movie. I also still felt very awake and alert given the time.

At 3am, Cam and Drew made the decision to turn back for the hut pleading tiredness while Paul and I started up the slopes of Ngauruhoe.



**ABOVE:** Elliot O'Brien leading a class on walking in average conditions

About halfway up we broke out of the cloud. Suddenly everything was calm. The stars were out, the near full moon lit up our slopes as well as Ruapehu. Through the cloud we could look down to the saddle where a couple people were coming through with head torches on moving like little glowing ants. If a genie had popped out from under a rock right then and offered for me to be anywhere in the world, looking at the great coliseum, or lounging on a beach in the Bahamas I would have given given a very curt response, I was content where I was. After a moment of soaking it all in we kept slogging up.

Paul and I reached the crater rim not long after 5am. To the east the sky was just beginning to lighten while the moon still hung to the west. Here we took a few photos and tried to get warm. It was so cold sat in the wind I may have reconsidered that genies offer. At 6.30 I decided to make a phone call, I called granddad.

"Hey Granddad, sorry to be calling you so early but you'll never guess where I am right now!"

"Where's that?" sounding indignant.

"I'm on top of Ngauruhoe!"

There was much laughter before he decided he could probably forgive me for the wakeup call. He wanted to know what it was like up there and said he was relieved he wasn't the only one in the family who seems to enjoy high levels of discomfort.

Our descent went far quicker than our climb. By sitting down and bum-sliding for a hundred meters at a time dragging our ice axes behind us for brakes, snow flying up in our face as we went. Aside from the bruises to the hips and the numb sensation around the buttocks that was a great deal of fun. From there it was a tired stagger down the saddle, meeting a few bulging-eyed walkers who asked where we'd been we finally made it back to the hut. Rolling in at 8.30am having been awake for 27 hours and on my feet most of those the fatigue suddenly hit hard, hard enough that I fell asleep in the sun lying balanced on a board outside the hut. Thanks to having such a good crew for adventures outside the norm and for gear and experience that I wouldn't normally have access to.



**ABOVE:** *A sneaky pick me up?*

**BELOW:** *Climbing above the clouds*



**ABOVE:** *Standing on the Summit at last*

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## ***Public Service Announcements***

### **Bayleys Road Crag Closure:**

Bayleys Road Crag, Wharepapa South is closed until further notice. The CNI Section of NZAC is negotiating the future of the crag with respect to recent changes in liability law.

### **Pakeho Crag Closure:**

As of November, Pakeho Crag will be closed to the public. The new owners have made the decision due to conflict with their own tourism operators.

# ***Snowcraft – Intermediate Course***

*by Michael Donovan*

**How did I end up writing this? Probably because some the students on the course had way to much fun and are too busy doing their own climbing to sit down and give the piece of writing I asked them for. So instead, I offer you the instructor’s perspective.**

I politely declined the boss’s offer of a beer. He said I’d need it but I also needed to drive. After a very long drive, a sneaky burger at the Tussock, and running into way to many ski bunnies that I knew, we were off up the mountain to Delta Ridge. When you are old and stiff like my, walking up to Delta Ridge in the dark after a day on your feet at work is not fun. But these are the sacrifices we instructors make for our students.

Saturday was spent focusing on the basics of the rope work and anchors. As usual for a day instructing, my feet were cold and my chocolate froze then melted a few times; that’s the trouble with good weather days on a mountain. After eventually finishing off my chocolate, the day was finished off with a nice set of top ropes to give the participants a chance to challenge themselves. Between belaying and getting some people a new profile picture, Elliot and Mike start obsessing over a bold little mixed lead they had found. But of course instructing took priority so no sketchy climbing was undertaken. Right at the end of the day, said ski bunnies from the night before dropped into say hi, and unlike the second course I was instructing on last year I can proudly say I was in no way tempted to steal their skis.

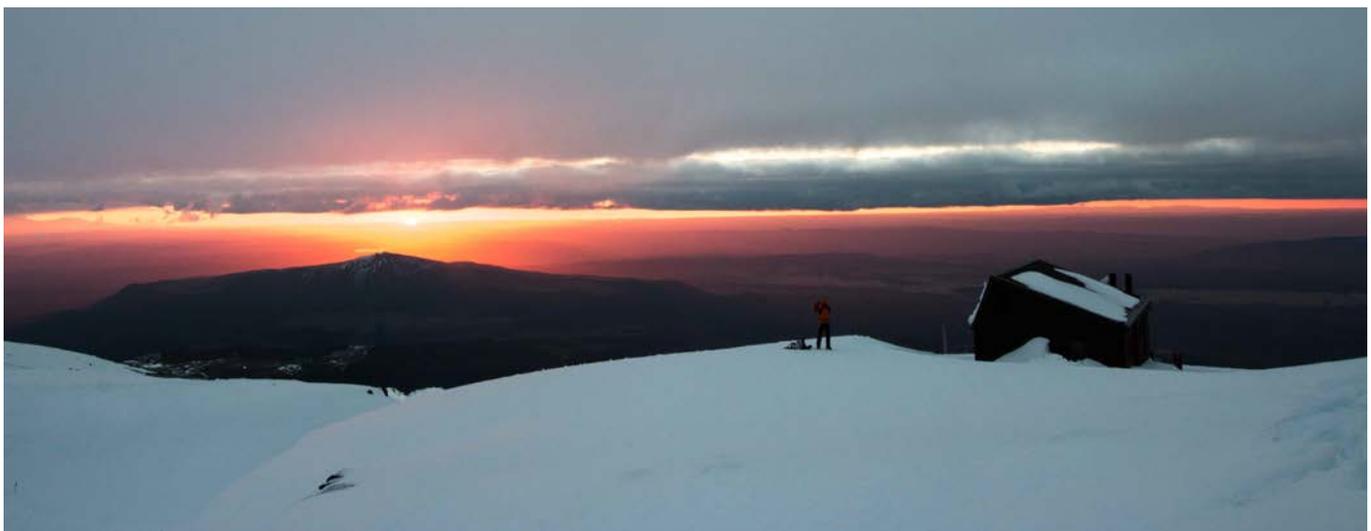
Sunday was spent in the shadow of the Pinnacle Ridge putting the lessons of the day before into practice. It was nice to be back in the shadow of a hill again, it does wonders for keeping the chocolate from going through a freeze thaw cycle all day. But my downie was needed for most of the day as the participants learnt a valuable lesson in just how slow pitching can be. Especially when I keep telling them to stop and build another belay.

Hopefully now I’m fired from writing my own trip reports. Enjoy the photos though, they are pretty sweet.



**ABOVE:** *Top roping is fun for some, torture for others.*

**BELOW:** *Ahh, photo time. Then rum.*



# Trip Dates

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## Kawakawa Bay 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> October 2016:

A number of Kawakawa regulars are heading off on epic dirtbag adventures so come along to a way to early in the season trip to Kawakawa Bay. Will run in Michael's standard format; trad racks get free passage on Jock's boat, then those that pay up in alcohol can get their gear on as well. And maybe there'll be a few seats left. Talk to Michael Donovan

## South Island 26<sup>th</sup> December 2016 to 10<sup>th</sup> February 2017:

I'm heading to the South Island for just over a month leaving Boxing Day. I have an epic schedule planned and if you are looking at Paynes Ford, Charleston, Arthurs Pass, Castle Hill, Wanaka or the

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## Committee Contacts

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