

APPENDIX V.

A TRIP ACROSS THE TARARUA RANGES FROM GREYTOWN TO OTAKI.

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(NOTE.—For a description of the routes over the Tararua Range from Levin and Masterton (Mount Holdsworth), with map, see Appendix VII, Report of Department of Lands and Survey, 1910–11, p. 35.)

ATTENTION is drawn to the Tararua Ranges from time to time by accounts in the newspapers of different parties which have succeeded in crossing over the Mount Hector Track. Owing to the absence of information, and particularly of a good map of the locality, few people realize that within easy distance of Wellington there is an outing which should become one of their most popular holiday trips. Mount Hector is particularly interesting to Wellington people, as this is the peak that stands out so clearly, snow-clad on fine winter days, away up at the head of the Hutt Valley.

The track committee on the Wairarapa side has been working steadily for some time past, and a good pack-track has been cut through the bush right on to the open tops, while huts are in course of erection, which should simplify the journey considerably. It is possible to make the trip from Greytown to Otaki in two days, providing the weather is clear along the main range, but to do so it is necessary to push ahead all the time, and half the pleasure of the outing is lost. To avoid disappointment it is well to have a few extra days in hand—there are some lovely spots to explore—and if the mist comes on when you have reached the high camps you are prepared to wait for the opportunity to push ahead, instead of having to return disgusted. The bush portion of the journey can be traversed at any time, but it is absolutely necessary to have clear weather along the tops in order to follow the main range. In this respect the Tararuas are rather unkind, as the north-westerly wind, which is the prevailing one, almost invariably brings up the mist. Numbers of people have got up as far as the bush-line and then had to return owing to the mist and because their time was limited.

I had made two previous attempts last year when the weather compelled a return, so this Easter I set out with two companions, having a longer time at my disposal, and was fortunate enough to get almost ideal weather after the first day. I carried a camera and barometer, and made notes on my way through with a view to making a map of the route, and herewith give the following account of our experiences, which should serve as a guide to future climbers:—

We left Wellington by the 4.25 p.m. train on the Thursday, having with us an alpine tent, sleeping-bags, change of clothes, oilskin cape, "tucker," an alpine cooker, and a slasher. In order to lighten our load we travelled up in walking-costume of heavy boots, putties, short pants, grey-flannel shirt, and light coat, and caused a good deal of amusement as we marched down to Lambton Station.

We arrived at Woodside about 8.15, adjusted our swags, and set out for Basset's hut. Most parties prefer to go on to Greytown by train and drive out to Basset's hut early next morning, but as it was a clear moonlight night, and we had been over the route before, we decided to push on that night.

Leaving the station we walked along the railway-line for a few chains till we struck the Waiohine Valley Road, turned to the left, and then a few chains farther on took the right-hand turning, passed through a gate, and saw two roads ahead. The one continuing straight ahead runs to a settler's homestead, but the one veering to the left is our route. This road runs along a stony flat, up a short rise, through a gate, along another flat past Jackson's homestead on the left, down a terrace with the Waiohine River roaring alongside, and through a gate on to a low grass flat. After proceeding along this flat for a few chains a small stream is met with, and Basset's hut is discerned on the left about 4 chains from the road.

We could not help comparing our journey up in the bright moonlight with a former attempt in the dark, when we scrambled along nearly losing one another, almost tumbled into the Waiohine River, passed Basset's hut, and then came back and struck matches for ten minutes before we located it.

We took fifty minutes to come from the station, and as we neared the hut noticed two horses feeding in boxes, and approached with some misgivings as to its being occupied. We had our tent, but as it was now after 9 p.m. we hoped to be saved the necessity of pitching. Pushing open the door, a pile of pack-saddles, stores, and other gear denoted that the track packers were making use of it, though probably they had gone out for the holidays.

We soon made ourselves at home, and, getting out the alpine cooker, had tea on in a few minutes. This cooker is worthy of a passing description. It consists of a small flat lamp burning methylated spirits, a wind-screen, two pots, a frying-pan which can be used as a lid to the pots, and a detachable handle that fits everything, the whole outfit being made of aluminium, and fitting together into a very compact light parcel. These are in use in the Mount Cook district, and can be obtained from A. and W. McCarthy, of Dunedin.

Where wood is plentiful down in the low camps the value of this cooker is not very apparent, but away up along the high tops it is delightful to be able to squat down alongside one of the many beautiful tarns and boil the billy or have some soup without the necessity of scouring the range for firewood.

We turned in hoping for a nice fine morning, but during the night the wind arose and the rain came on, necessitating a rearrangement of positions owing to a hole in the corner of the roof.

Friday turned out a miserable day—a howling gale with rain—so we decided to stay where we were. We added to the larder by gathering mushrooms, and kept ourselves amused by playing