

The ridge north from the iconic skyline feature 'The Gap' used to be a favourite of mine. It was clean tussock country that maintained height and had great views. It was quite unmodified and a priority to protect along with its adjoining native forest valleys. It formed the north end of the Silverpeak Walkway and all parties agreed to its preservation. It's piecemeal destruction began in the name of extending the reserve by land exchanges and by unnecessary and unsympathetic bulldozing. I asked Lands and Survey and the DCC why they wouldn't do a modest loop to protect 'The Gap' and incorporate it into the developing Scenic Reserve. "Not necessary. It will be safe. Nobody will harm that." It appears there was no aesthetic understanding coupled with not really wanting to do anymore than the minimum. Had the ridge been dozed right from the start the damage would have been much less than what happened during the agreed 'saving it from damage' period. I expressed my dismay to the Otago Walkway Committee. To this day I have not been able to face walking down that ridge, knowing what it was like previously.



On Sunday afternoon the 7th of December, 1997 I witnessed, along with members of the Dunedin Teen Conservation Club, bulldozer desecration of the now privately owned 'Gap'.
KDM



George Arras, former Mt Cook guide, with his skis on Flagstaff.
H S Tily 1925. Olive Cartwright Collection



Ian and Jennifer Mackie on Swampy.
H S Tily 1925. Olive Cartwright Collection



The first Otago Tramping Club woman president, Miss Agnes Edmond, opening Green Hut June 3, 1933. The men had replaced the beer in the bottle with cold tea. The hut celebrated the club's 10th year and was originally a day's walk from Dunedin. A collapsed Green Hut was demolished on August 14, 1988. *Photos CM Lucas Collection*



More official obdurateness and dirt

To give an idea how dirty government departments and their ilk can be, in 1988, pre-tenure review, Landcorp tried to impose a commercial permit for usage of the OTMC's eight bunk Leaning Lodge on the Rock and Pillar Range. Our genial runholder host, Neil Grant, was threatened with the loss of his pastoral lease if he continued to allow the Club's use of the hut without a permit from Landcorp. There was nothing commercial about the hut, so the club refused to comply. The Club stood its ground and insisted that Landcorp remove the threat to Neil Grant. This duly occurred.

In 2003 battle lines were set again, held, and emphatically won by saving Big Hut, a spacious icon of the 1940s, on the alpine tops of the Rock and Pillar Range. DoC was set to have it demolished. Just reflect on what could have happened to all those existing older, historic huts sprinkled in the areas under-going tenure review in Otago. Bruce quietly patched up several other vulnerable huts further afield so

they would be 'less attractive for removal'. Today DoC values and maintains these facilities whereas before, in compliance with some crazy whim from Wellington, they were looking for huts to demolish.



Being battle prepared: newly colour steel armoured. Geoff and Peter at work. *KDM*

Big Hut 'Redoubt' even had its own flag of proclamation. Bruce was the main force behind the Rock and Pillar Hut Trust saving the hut. John Langley and Alan Stout also contributed. Brother Peter and my son Mark are trustees. I lurked in the shadows on work days. We were indebted to many supporters, especially the Strath Taieri Community and latterly Geoff McHardy.

I am not the modest one in my family, so hear goes. Bruce's landmark publications, eight years in the making, *Outdoor Recreation in Otago, (1989) Vols 1 & 2*, with their resource information, maps, new concepts for recreation planning and comprehensive references were a major factor in paving the way for high-country tenure review in the South Island. He was the first person in NZ to apply the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) for land management. Bruce effectively mapped out what was needed to be retained as protected reserves over hundreds of thousands of hectares. Thirty or so years later the boundaries of high-altitude lands now with conservation area or reserve status have a striking resemblance to what Bruce delineated. Every DOC office appeared to have copies of Bruce's epic publications on their desks. But they gave no author recognition. They just mined his work without acknowledgement until more site-specific information had accumulated as tenure review progressed.

Back to the Silverpeaks

Many of us learned the skills of tramping in youthful forays into the handy-to-Dunedin Silverpeaks with little cost outlay and relative safety. Initial contact with the area was probably on a half force-marched school tramp. Then great adventures followed with just your friends, free from all those constraining adults. Gone also was an Otago Girls High School Tramping Club party minus supervisors. A suspicious teacher found them in the sack with guys at the former Green Hut. All that booze and cans of cheap watery baked beans are bloody heavy and don't give much energy. The boys that perished in the snow storm were carrying heavy, but non-alcoholic, refreshments to enjoy at the old Jubilee Hut plus a block of wood and newspaper for fire lighting; no great misjudgement, just youthful inexperience. We have all had that.

In my formative tramping days those cheap outgrown parkas I wore resulted in my cotton clothing becoming cold and miserably wet - uncomfortable, but necessary experience towards growing into the greater outdoors. My cohorts got away with it in ignorance, in this usually benign environment. Tragically the boys above did not. Long may it be a great place for a forgiving apprenticeship and fond memories including for those who go on to explore the world's remote and high places. I can recall many who started their life adventure in our local hills.



Mr Robinson

You are not the villain. Neither generally are official field workers. The faceless, cowardly bureaucrats who get well paid regardless of the standard of their work are. They actively encouraged, tempted and helped you on your path. Many a tale has been told around a Silverpeaks campfire by those who remember you as a colourful, almost legendary, character. Inept officialdom was no match for you.

A pig/tramper live-capture cage in the Silverpeaks. Fortunately the two-legged ones can get out. KDM

Never, never assume that something you treasure is finally safe. It can suddenly and unexpectedly come under threat or be deliberately and subtly changed in little increments over a longer period of time.

Just a handful of years ago I shared a very warm, amicable moment with DOC. They rang me to ask what should be done with the gazetted walkway status of the Silverpeak spine. Usage patterns had evolved and changed. They said; “it is not receiving much use”.

“Just let it alone,” I said, “it's successfully fulfilled its purpose.”

My thanks to the late Professor Douglas Coombs for freely giving me paid time off work from the Geology Department to attend to Walkway matters throughout Otago. Others didn't have that opportunity.

