

Very notable associates

The one and only Ken Blackwood

There are many interesting mountain characters that I could write about. To me one stands out from the others. Ken Blackwood.

In 1967 my first sighting of Ken was to be indicative of things to come. I came upon a man falling off a rock tor he was climbing and land, unharmed, on his feet. Surviving falls safely and finding places from which you could fall became one of his trademarks. He frequently wore a kilt as he cycled around town to earn one of two nicknames: 'Haggis Man'; the other was 'Pinocchi' due to his distinctive nose. He had used his charm and persuasiveness to get himself both into and out of often dangerous situations all over the world. It was a delight to watch him work the ladies with his palm reading.



Ken Blackwood serenading us in a rock bivvy

Ken was at least ten years older than most of us but was very strong and tended to get ahead to lead the party. I had been up the Dart River and through the then untracked Beans Burn before, without any sign of a bluff. Not so with Ken. We had to rope down two, one in the Dart, another in the Beans Burn. On the positive side we did find an unrecorded natural bridge. Later Ken's strength was an advantage when the party did a possible new route to Forgotten River and thence the Olivine Ice Plateau by going over the top of Sunset Peak.



Approaching Forgotten River Col. Ken found that he could get extra wear out of worn-out shirts if you wore more than one so the holes did not overlap

Ken, Yosuke Kawachi and I summited Mt Earnslaw via the East face just in time to enjoy a glorious sunset. That was not good timing. We had to descend a number of bluffs to Wright Col in the dark. Ken's rope trademark was his unanchored standing shoulder belay and assurances that he could hold you. For once I tried to

have complete faith in him but without looking up to see his usual stance of leaning over the edge.

In the summer of 1972-73 both Ken and I were working in the field in Antarctica. Here Ken displayed his considerable initiative and skills. He used a piece of hot wire to sew the split fibre glass body of a skidoo back together. However no normal person would have had to do this. Right in front of my eyes he somehow managed to roll the skidoo on perfectly flat snow-covered sea ice.



Ken repairing the rolled skidoo

At Scott Base Ken volunteered to sort and organise the stores. I suspect he was re-invited the following season as nobody else could follow his system.

Our OTMC Temple Valley to South Huxley crossing struck a firm snow slope late in the day while descending into the Huxley. The more experienced members had to relay about a dozen trampers about four full rope lengths. This took time so Ken rushed ahead to find a campsite in fading light. Others found a good campsite in the snow grass. Ken was trying to call us down to join him in a scrubby basin below. We decide it was best for the whole party to stay put. I think Ken wanted us to

come down as he only had a tent fly, no cooker and limited food. In the morning we paralleled his route down missing all the small bluffs. He had left a trail of skid marks and crash landing sites in the alpine scrub all the way down to the last big splat in his basin. Ken was fine and ready to go.

Our large OTMC party was based at Unwin Hut at Mt Cook. Ken, Judy Knewstubb, a young guy and myself set out to work our way up a route through snowy bluffs to climb Mt Sebastipol. Just short of the summit Judy began to have severe stomach cramps, vomiting and worse. I sent Ken rushing back down to get a rescue party. At the back of my mind I knew he would skid and bump his way down safely. As the young guy needed to concentrate on using his ice axe it was over to me to help Judy. I supported her on my shoulder and dragged her down the snow towards the normal route up Sebastipol. Suddenly, just short of the Red Tarn, Judy coughed up a large chunk of dehydrated peach. Without this blocking the system her improvement was spectacular. By then the 20 strong stretcher party was arriving at the top of the rocky ridge. The stretcher was not needed now. However the boys were determined to use it. Anchoring teams were set up and Judy was strapped on for an exciting but jovial ride down. Ken must have made a very fast descent to get a rescue party so fast. I still wonder how many splat marks he left on his descent.

Ken was always inventing all sorts of homemade gear. Fold up canoes, collapsible put-away skis, bivvy-bomb cookers etc. They all sort of worked but strangely nobody else wanted to try them. Possibly his ultimate cunning plan was to renew the roof of his Mother's house in Dunedin *and* build a yacht at the same time. The plan was to first build the keel in the ceiling, then lift off the roof with a crane, followed by the yacht, then replace the roof. I didn't hear if this eventuated. It didn't need to; it was such a good tale.

Ken's skiing technique caused both mirth and amazement. Mirth at the number of big wipeouts he had. Amazement at how he neither gave up nor hurt himself. The last we knew of him he was in Canada working as a ski field patroller.

Bill Proven

I did a number of trips with Bill and a pattern began to emerge. It seemed that he was cursed with attracting wet weather. Others even considered removing their name from OTMC trip lists if Bill's name appeared on it. We were only half joking when we inquired as to if he was staying home or going into the mountains that weekend before we made a decision.



Bill on Brewster

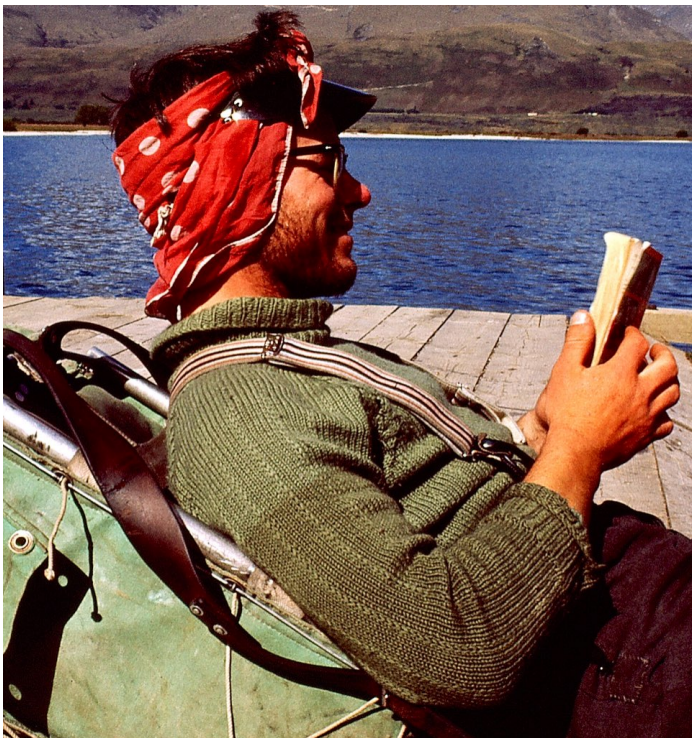
Dick Brasier



Roger D Conroy

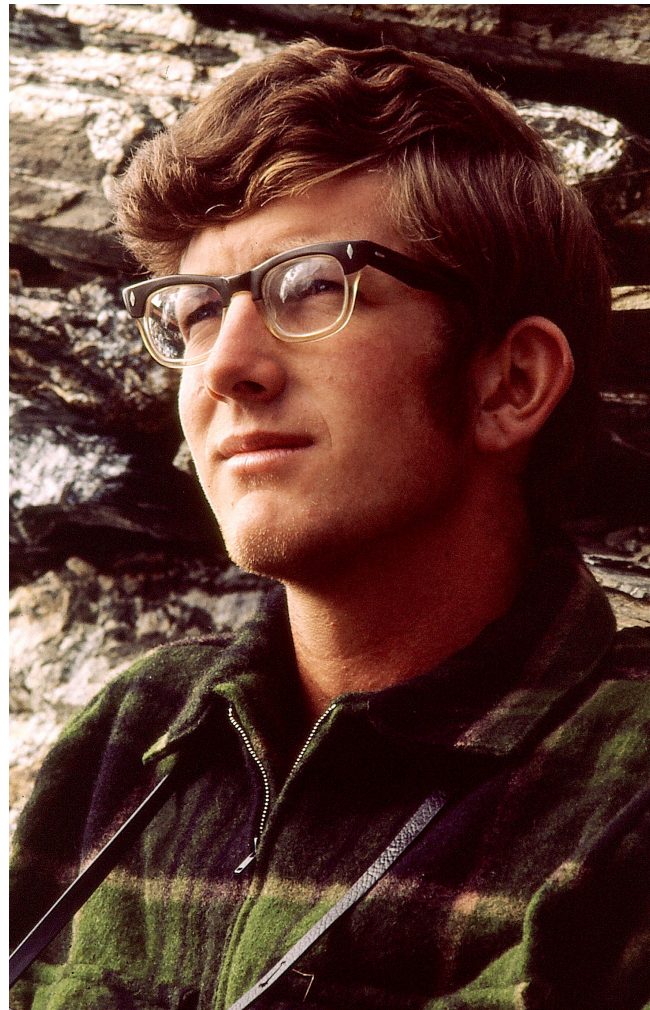


Absent Friends



Richard Tilly

Chris Jackson



Kelvin Liggett