



After much planning and preparation, 7 of us finally arrived at the start of the first of two tramps – in front of us was 9 days, 100km, 5000m up and the same down, 4 alpine passes, tops walking and river valleys, some tracked and some route-finding. The forecast was unbelievably good with clear skies and cool south-westerly breezes (except for the first night with a chance of a light shower and low cloud).

We started with a short sharp 500m climb from the Mt Robert carpark up on to Robert Ridge, a 10km undulating spine of boulders and scree, with the stunningly beautiful Lake Angelus as our target for the night. Away in good time the next morning, true to forecast, the showers had cleared but low cloud threatened to obliterate any views. The last time I had walked this Cedric Track, we had horizontal sleet and were lucky to see the next snow-pole! Magically, as we approached the major



descent for the day (1300m – the last 1000m in just 3km of track – wearily steep) the weather cleared and we were treated to views in all directions – across Lake Rotoroa, up the Sabine Valley (our route) and along an endless procession of mountain ranges.

With legs screaming at the constant descent, sadly Michele took an awkward tumble and broke her wrist (later confirmed as a double break). We managed to complete the remainder of the descent to Sabine Hut and reassess the situation. A fortuitous offer of

assistance from two fisherman to take M to the Nelson Hospital provided a way for treatment to be delivered speedily and for the remainder of us to continue with the trip. Still in shock ourselves, there was very little conversation for the remainder of the day.



From our camp on a flat beside the Sabine River, we set off for an easy day – a gradual climb to Blue Lake. This alpine tarn is stunning in its iridescent blues and greens with a delightful campsite amongst the grasses backed by Beech trees and soaring peaks all around.



The next day looked challenging – a 300m climb above and around Lake Constance with a sharp descent to the head of the lake. Then the big climb – 500m on boulders and scree to Waiiau Pass immediately

followed by a 600m descent to the valley floor. Not content with that, there would be another 400m climb to Lake Thompson and an isolated campsite. In execution, 8 hours of amazing terrain, we surprised ourselves with our stamina.



From this eagle's eyrie, we had a decision to make – descent to the D'Urville valley floor and immediately climb to the next Pass or sidle across boulders, scree, bluffs and snow-grass (the second option being shorter but more challenging). Opting for the latter in fact turned out to be surprisingly straight-forward with only one or two bluffy sections being a bit tricky. Not, however, a place for apprehension with height ! From D'Urville Pass we had a steep descent to the boulder-filled river and a long slow tramp to East Matakita hut. Fortunately, a newly-cut section of track above the hut slashed an hour's travel from our day and we made camp in good time.

A 'rest day' of just 4 hours on-track brought us to Bob's Hut on the West Matakita River and a chance to wash and dry clothing, repair gear and patch feet.



Expecting another long day, we struck off for 3 Tarns Pass on a good track for the first 5km. Crossing to the true left and leaving track and river far below, we climbed high above a gorge before descending back into the river where boulder-hopping was preferable (and faster travel) than pushing through Spaniard grass (a particularly spiky plant that we all quickly learned to identify at a distance!). The ascent to the 3 Tarns was demanding and a break was in order – our campsite was just a km away (with a 100m scree climb and descent in between). Another idyllic location, we were treated to a very colourful sunset, as we stood on the top of the cliffs we would descend the next morning.



What looked like an impossible task, we picked our way down a boulder field of epic proportions – the world is certainly not deficient in rocks. Surprisingly easy, we made the 400m 30deg descent in an hour and continued down to the St James Walkway (a track with boardwalk and bridges!) and Cannibal Gorge Hut. Unfortunately, our second injury occurred with Mabel finding a hole amongst the snow-grass and tearing a medial ligament. Although she made it to the end of the walk, the second tramp was out of the question.

This was expected to be a very challenging tramp with fabulous scenery – we were not disappointed. Rather, we were amazed that we had achieved so much.

Bernie Quirke