

Climbing in the Southern Alps

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When I did get to the top, it was well worth it; I could see the Pacific to the east, Mount Cook to the northwest, the Southern Alps and the beautiful inland lakes running to the south. It was one of the most spectacular views I have ever seen. I threw a few snowballs around (there was still snow on the top) to get in the Christmas spirit and headed down, determined to visit those Alps and Mount Cook National Park.

WEEK OFF
After the job in Hakaramea was finished, I took a week off and hitched some rides up to Mount Cook. Unfortunately, the youth hostel was jammed full and I had to shell out \$20 for a room for the night. However, that evening I met some guides who put me on to the Canterbury Mountaineering Club, which maintains a small lodge about a mile's walk from the Hermitage. It only cost me \$2 a night.

I met the guides in the Tavern Bar, located around the side of the Hermitage, out of sight and out of mind, according to the hotel.
This little pub, I should explain, is the hotel management's concession to the outdoor types of the area. You see, if you give them their own bar, it keeps them from patronizing the main flashy ones in the hotel proper, reserved for guests.

It is a situation that both parties approve of and appreciate. The climbers, for their part, couldn't care less about the tourist, and the tourist would rather not sit beside a man who has just spent two strenuous weeks in the mountains and has dropped by for a quick beer before he sees a shower. The climbers' sensibilities are not as delicate or keen as the tourists (in some respects) and he most definitely has his priorities.

If you had come to Mount Cook to talk to some authentic alpine types, it was apparent that in this one bar were gathered the cream of the area's climbers, guides, trappers and characters extraordinaire.

Making my way through the crowd at the bar I managed to secure a quart of beer and, not finding much standing room in the narrow pub, wandered outside on to the even narrower covered balcony. This balcony overlooks Mount Sefron on the immediate left and away up the Hooker Valley can be seen the difficult south face of Mount Cook (climbed first by Sir Edmund Hillary) and its lower and middle summits. On a clear day it is an incredible view, comparable to anything the European Alps has to offer. In the falling darkness and thickening mists the dramatic starkness of the peaks became very impressive.

It was in the Tavern Bar that I met Brian Dison, an alpine guide when he isn't doing serious climbing. He stands a rangy six foot two, has a modified afro hair style, wire frame glasses and wears the climber's ever-present bandana around his neck. At 23, he has already established himself as a competent climber, even though he has been climbing less than four years.

It was Brian who introduced me to Guy Cotter and his friend Murray. They took me rock climbing one day and I must say I was very nervous.

The rock face was only about 200 feet high, but to get to it we had to scramble over and up a couple of hundred feet of fallen rock. The overall impression of height, therefore, was much greater, as the valley floor

seemed a long way down. Anyway it wasn't the height that bothered me, I'm all right as long as I've got something to hold on to, but the thought of moving on the rock. It took me a long time to settle down and

for my legs to quit shaking, but once I did it was quite exciting and offered an insight into the devil-may-care attitude of the climbers in the area. They tend to be some crazy boys. After Mount Cook, I headed

for Timaru and then to Christchurch, where I received a new job. Next week I'll be writing about deer hunting in the mountains around Methven and deer farming on the Banks Peninsula.

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