

South Wairarapa Tramping Club

Newsletter for September 2023

www.swtc.org.nz

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Club night:

Tuesday 12 September 7.30 pm

Studio 73, Main Street Greytown

Speaker: TBA

Supper: (tea towel, milk and biscuits) Bruce & Mary Lambert

At the end of each club meeting, the people who did the supper should pass the supper box to the people next on the roster.

For the next two meetings the roster is:

October: David and Kay Bowie

November: Billy Adair

Trip List

2023

Date	Destination	Trip coordinator	Phone	Fitness

If you wish to go on a trip, please let the organiser know by the Thursday prior.

Trip Gradings

The letters are an indication of how tough it will be.

- E Easy.** Completely flat, no hills, 2 – 3 hours.
- M Moderate fitness.** Some hills, well formed tracks. 4-6 hours walk per day.
- F More fitness.** Steep hills, challenging tracks. May go off tracks. 6 – 8 hours walk per day.

Leaders: Please remember if you are unable to lead your trip it is your responsibility to find a replacement leader / trip.

Trip Reports

BIKE RIDE TO FEATHERSTON VIA RAIL TRAIL 26 AUGUST

We all met at the Rail Trail at 9.30 for a ride to Featherston. The day was brilliant after the weather we've had. Down the track we biked, lots of walkers with dogs and bikers going both ways, all taking the opportunity of the good weather. We had to be careful on the gravel on the Underhill Rd section before the rail bridge. We stopped at the picnic table for a rest before we went over the bridge. People were still coming in both directions, it was certainly a busy trail. Over the bridge and down to the Underhill section to Featherston, more gravel so careful again. Arrived at Featherston at 10.30, an hour exactly from Greytown.

We parked our bikes and went over to the cafe for a scone and coffee. Featherston was busy too. We left again around 11.15am for the bike home taking another hour. We biked about 34 kms altogether. A good morning's ride and good company. Thanks to those who joined us. Billy Adair, Barry Kempton, Neil Johnstone, Jen and Bob Pomeroy, and organisers for the day Mary and Bruce Lambert.





POINT 810, 12 AUGUST 2023

A joint SWTC and MTC trip

Nigel Boniface, Neil Johnstone, Mike Kean and John Rhodes hoped for a clear view of snow-clad Tararuas from this viewpoint on the old Sayers Track. On the way up, when we reached the dividing ridge between the Waiohine and the Mangatarere we diverted to point 768, checking for signs of the missing tramper.

As seen from point 810 the tops were mostly in cloud and the wind was brisk, so we took photographs and retreated to the bush for lunch. The return was uneventful.

Photos are at <http://swtc.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/2023.08.12-Point-810.pdf>

WAIRARAPA WALKING FESTIVAL

SATURDAY 2 SEPTEMBER AT 2PM CARTERTON EVENTS CENTRE

ALL WELCOME

Ra Smith, Te Haututu , Ngati Kahungunu, ki Wairarapa talks about Maori explorers.
Gareth Winter, Wairarapa Archives, talks about early European walkers.

Tracey Higgins launches the full Wairarapa-wide programme.
Pene Will explains the Carterton Historical self-guided walk.

Celia Wade-Brown will MC.

30 walks throughout Wairarapa

For further information: info@wairarapawalkingfestival.com

Roger Coventry remembered
10 November 1934 – 1 August 2023

By John Rhodes, with thanks to Roger's family for information and photographs

I first met Roger one evening in May 1980, at the meeting in the Featherston County office in Martinborough that established South Wairarapa Tramping Club. The circumstances leading to this, and the partnership between Roger and Chris Bland, have been outlined in recent issues of this newsletter. Our son Colin and I attended after seeing a notice in a Greytown shop window—the 1980 equivalent of social media.

The club's inaugural trip was on Sunday 25 May. We chose the easy Remutaka Incline walk to attract people, and about 30 came. On the way back Dave Woodcock and I walked with Roger, giving me my first opportunity to get to know him (I already knew Dave). Both were former Tararua Tramping Club (TTC) members, Dave in the 1930s and '40s, and Roger in the 1950s. Thanks to Roger's modesty, I learned only much later that he was a tramping legend. He'd competed in the Wellington Trampers' Marathon five times from 1956 to 1976, winning it twice and gaining fastest time on no fewer than three occasions.

The annual marathon began in 1930 and continued until 1995. It involved running (in standard tramping boots) from the Catchpool Valley over the Five Mile Track to the Orongorongo River, then about 6 kilometres down the river and back to the Catchpool via the Baker and Butcher tracks, with a 400-metre climb and descent. Runners were handicapped, those with the best reputations and pedigrees starting last, so you could win the race without doing the fastest time. Inter-club competition was intense.

Roger's 1959 performance was especially notable, for he was both first and fastest with a record time of 1 hour, 20 minutes and 20 seconds that stood for four years. Roger was one of only five runners to achieve the first and fastest 'double' in the history of the race, and the only one ever to break the course record at the same time.



Roger winning the Trampers' Marathon, 11 February 1959

Roger was no stranger to wilderness country. In the summer of 1953/54, with Tom Carter, Rowen Crawford and Graham Miller of TTC, he went up the Matukituki and over Hector Col into the Waipara. They climbed to Cloudmaker Lake on the Haast Range and summited Spike, Moonraker and Helen. Next they traversed the range with its evocative names—Stargazer, Skyscraper, Mainroyal and Rolling Pin—to the Bonar Glacier, and so back to the Matukituki.ⁱ This is part of the vast area that would later become Mt Aspiring National Park—difficult, wild, remote and awe-inspiring country, with virtually no huts or tracks.

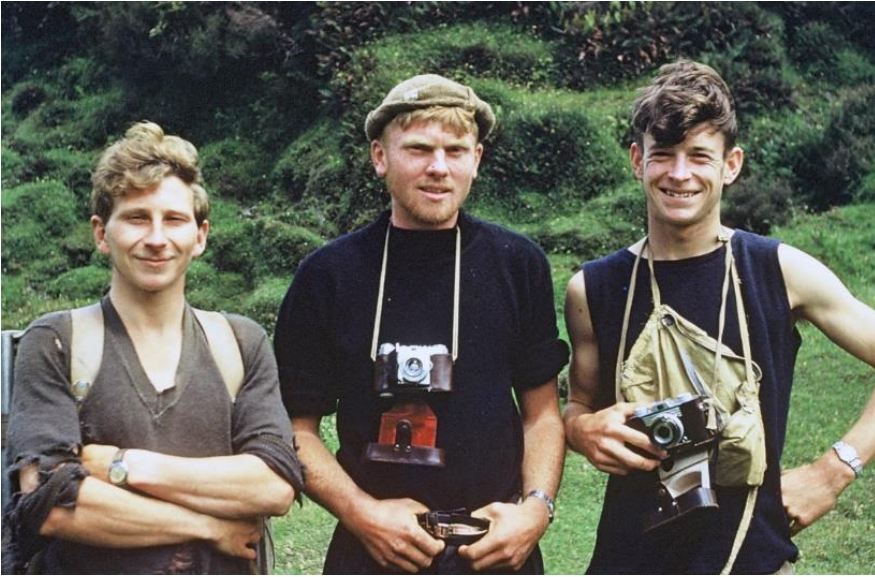
Two summers later, Roger, Tom Carter and Rowen Crawford, this time with Dave Herd, completed an even bigger trip over three weeks. The first nine days took them across the Olivine Ice Plateau to the Williamson, and then down Ten Hour Gorge in the Arawhata.



Olivine Ice Plateau with Gable Peak beyond. Roger, Tom and Dave (Rowen Crawford)

For ordinary mortals, this alone would have been the trip of a lifetime. However, rather than heading down the Arawhata to the West Coast, the four then crossed the Eros Range to the Waipara, and—now in familiar country—climbed to Matukituki Saddle and sidled through perilously steep country to the Bonar Glacier and French Ridge Bivvy, the first hut they'd seen on the trip. Their sights were on Mt Aspiring, but the weather—which had favoured them till now—dictated withdrawal to the valley, Wanaka and food.

They had carried all their supplies, plus climbing gear, for two Christmas trips end on end, starting with 74 lb. (34 kg) packs. I've been in strong parties that have traversed some of the same country, and know that what Roger and his companions achieved is mind-boggling. The full story, by Rowen Crawford, is on the TTC website at [Olivines Trip 1954-1955](#)ⁱⁱ



Tom, Dave and Roger at the end of the trip (Rowen Crawford)



Roger on the west ridge of Malte-Brun with TTC, 1950s

A Wellington-based trumper needed more accessible challenges as well, and the Tararuas provided these. An account by Roger of a northern crossing in October 1955 shows how he loved being in the hills—in the words of his son Geoff, ‘Breathing nature’s embrace with every step’.

The night was young when our party of six assembled in Ohau Hut, and with the twinkling stars promising a fine day on the morrow we pushed on up the river to South Ohau Hut for the night. ... We left at 6 a.m. on Saturday and pounded up to Te Matawai. A breather and on we went towards the tops and the snow.

Here two turned back, leaving Tony Robins, Merv. Rodgers, George Broadbent and Roger to continue.

Cramming down some scroggin we pressed on, over Arete and towards the Waiohine Pinnacles. What a view! On all sides the peaks were glistening in their winter snow, Bannister on the left, Mitre ahead. On and on, we crossed the pinnacles and stopped for lunch by a frozen tarn. Clouds began to shroud the higher peaks, but the sun was hot we still wore only shorts and shirt. ... Before long we were kicking and cutting our way onto

the hard smooth cone of Girdlestone. No time to stop, we almost ran round to Brockett and shortly after we pulled up short at the base of Mitre.

Hoping the mist would clear when we reached the top, we struggled up this last stiff climb and finally only the 'down' part remained. Out to Peggy's Peak we hurried, when, lo and behold, the clouds broke and there was the setting sun in all its glorious colour. Shutters clicked while impatient boots stamped, and finally we ran and slid down to the bush, reaching the track just as darkness fell.



View from Mitre at dusk, winter

Near the bottom they missed the track in the dark and 'wound up in the South Mitre Stream just at a very fine campsite. After 14 hours' tramping, we could still eat eight pints of stew between the four of us.'ⁱⁱⁱ

In 1957 Roger went to North America. He worked in Calgary, then travelled south through Glacier and Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, out to San Francisco, through Yosemite and Death Valley (at night to avoid the heat) to the Grand Canyon. He explored Arizona to the Mexican border, then Texas and the southern states. After a couple of days in New York, Roger headed for Toronto, where he arrived penniless and got a job with a mineral exploration crew in northern Canada.^{iv}



Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming

Back in New Zealand, Roger was soon in the Tararuas again. TTC member Paddy Gresham recalls a 1960 middle crossing that he led. 'We left Ōtaki Forks before dawn and reached Dorset Ridge Hut after dark. We stopped twice, briefly. I fell asleep from exhaustion while eating the evening meal. It was the toughest day's tramping of my life'.^v

Roger was born in Eastbourne. The family (he had two brothers and a sister) moved to Waterloo during his early school years, and later to Upper Hutt. His first job after leaving Hutt Valley High School in 1953 was in Lever Brothers' soap factory in Petone. He then worked in a cheese factory before becoming a draughting cadet with the Ministry of Works, a job that took him to Fiji (Nadi Airport) and to Roxburgh, where he worked on the hydroelectric project.

Roger married Ann Cooke, a teacher, in January 1961. Theirs was a true tramping marriage, Ann being a member of HVTC. It was to last 62 years.



Ann and Roger (1959)

Roger worked briefly as a local authority health and building inspector for the central region, living in Taihape. He and Ann then had jobs on a dairy farm and a stud farm. In 1967 they moved to Tinui in eastern Wairarapa where they managed a farm in partnership with friends, and started raising three daughters and a son.



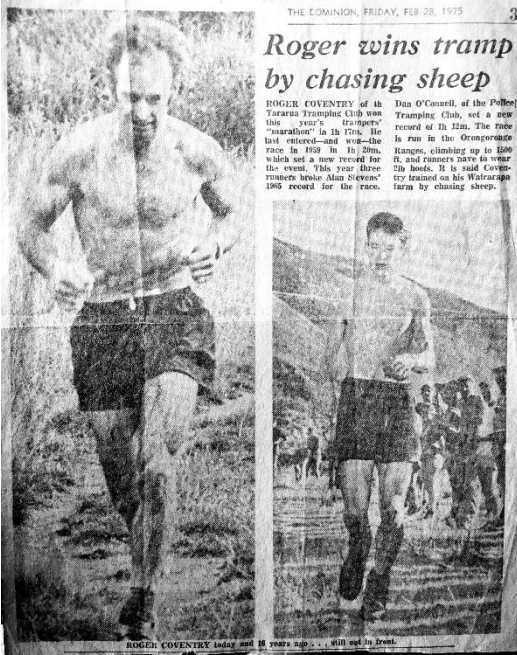
At home in Taihape (1963)

Farm life was busy and tramping had to take a back seat, but Roger's fitness didn't. In 1975 he ran in the Trampers' Marathon again, sixteen years after his record-breaking effort, and improved his time by more than 3 minutes. The standard had improved too, with three other competitors even faster, but Roger came in first. *The Dominion* reported, 'It is said Coventry trained on his Wairarapa farm by chasing sheep'. The paper ran photographs of him at the finish line in 1959 and in 1975 with the caption, 'Roger Coventry today and 16 years ago ... still out in front'.

Roger wins tramp by chasing sheep

ROGER COVENTRY of the Tararua Tramping Club won this year's tramping "marathon" in 14 hrs. He last entered—and won—the race in 1959 in 14 20m, which set a new record for the event. This year three runners broke Alan Stevens' 1966 record for the race.

Don O'Connell, of the Poller Tramping Club, set a new record of 14 15m. The race is run in the Orongorongo Ranges, climbing up to 4500 ft, and runners have to wear 20 loads. It is said Coventry trained on his Waikaranga farm by chasing sheep.



ROGER COVENTRY today and 16 years ago... still set by tramp.

A few weeks earlier, over the 1974/75 Christmas–New Year period, Roger had turned his attention to the Darran Mountains on the edge of Fiordland. With Chris Tait, Paul Chapman and John Anderson he climbed Mt Tūtuko (2723 m) from the Milford Sound road, then descended to the Hollyford. This may sound simple, but mountaineers rate Tūtuko highly for its difficulty and remoteness. The four then moved up the valley to Moraine Creek and climbed Apirana and Sabre Peaks before crossing back to the Milford road near the Homer Tunnel.^{vi}

Chris Tait had got to know Roger by scrub-cutting on the Tinui farm in his university holidays. He remembers impromptu races with his boss and mentor, flat out down the ridges and along the road, on the way home at the end of the day's work.

With two successes under his belt already, Roger made 1975 an even more notable year. That October, he tackled the Schormann's–Kaitoke (S–K) traverse of the Tararuas. The S–K, which has lured trampers and runners for many years (and still does), involves travelling the length of the range within a two-day weekend. The feat was first achieved in 1963 by Dave Capper (who now lives in Carterton) and Bruce Jefferies. As with Roger Bannister's 1954 four-minute mile, once Capper and Jefferies had broken the barrier, others succeeded too.

But a further S–K challenge remained—the seemingly impossible one of completing it within 24 hours. In October 1975, Roger made a failed solo attempt, but his 28-hour effort set a new mark. The account that he wrote for the January 1976 *Tararua Trampers* is reproduced elsewhere in this newsletter. Ann recalls that part of his preparation was to memorise the height of each of the many climbs on the traverse, totalling about 6800 metres. As she says, 'Roger just thrived on a challenge!'

In 1977, Roger and Ann bought their own small farm near Greytown, and Roger supplemented the farm income by working as a health inspector for Martinborough and Featherston Boroughs. One fortunate outcome of this move was the founding of the SWTC.

Roger's hope that our club would become a local version of the TTC, with which his tramping career began, was never realised. However, a July 1982 middle crossing of the Tararuas—planned, organised and led by him—gave a hint of what might have been.

Seven trampers set out from The Pines in light drizzle but with a full moon above, at about 8 p.m. on Friday night. We reached Mitre Flats Hut at 11 p.m. and were away again at 7.30 in the morning. One of us turned back with sore feet. The remaining six slogged up Mitre through heavy snow and in easterly clag, pausing below Peggys Peak to put on crampons. Fortunately, the snow on the steep west face of Mitre was soft.

Still in thick snow, we negotiated the pinnacles below Girdlestone, then headed down Dorset Ridge—with a quick scroggin stop by the big tarn—to reach Park Forks at 4.45 p.m. Darkness gathered as we climbed to Nichols Hut, but Roger knew exactly where to turn off the ridge to

find it. We ate dinner and crawled into our sleeping bags after a 12 hour day, but hunger roused us in the small hours for instant pudding and another brew. On Sunday it was still misty and cold, but we'd done the hard part and now it was just a matter of getting out, over Mt Crawford in more snow, then down over Junction and Shoulder Knobs to Waitewaewae.



Roger (centre) on Mt Crawford. Other photos of the 1982 trip are at <http://swtc.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/July-1982-Tararua-middle-crossing.pdf>

Because Colin Wheeler was tired and slow (he learned soon afterwards that he had diabetes), he and I followed at a sedate pace while the others went ahead to assure our van driver that we were coming. It was dark when we crossed the river at Ōtaki Forks. With only yards to go, we missed the track and found ourselves scrambling up a near-vertical bank through supplejack to the road. This was our only mistake in a memorable crossing.

In 1988, Roger took two of the Coventry children, Marilyn and Geoff, back to the Aspiring country. It was the trip of their lifetimes, for which they thank good weather, plenty of training in the Tararuas and most importantly their father's experience. They remember 'two weeks of strenuous bliss.'

From Lake Wakatipu we headed up the Rees, crossed the saddle at its head and descended into the Dart. Then up the Whitbourn River to an air-drop of food on the grassy flats just below the glacier.

With full packs and stomachs, we rose before dawn next day to head up the Whitbourn Glacier, crossing an ice bridge on the way up the crevassed slopes, to reach the ridge under Mt Maoriri. Traversing over to Whitbourn Saddle we began our descent of the Snow White Glacier, navigating through the icefall in fading light.



Roger belaying Marilyn on the ascent to Whitbourn Saddle, 1988

As the sun was setting we reached our bivouac spot by a tarn at the edge of the glacier overlooking the Arawhata River, after 15 hours over two glaciers. Next day we bushwhacked our way down into the Arawhata River to reach the rock bivvy for a rest day with a spectacular view of the twin waterfalls cascading down the cliffs beneath the Snowy Glacier.

Heading up the Arawhata, we crossed Waipara Saddle, then scrambled across scree past Matukituki Saddle, Hector Col and Bevan Col to the Bonar Glacier. A long plod across the Bonar to Colin Todd Hut, one of the few we saw on the trip. We scrambled up Shipowner Ridge, but with some risk of weather, decided against attempting Mt Aspiring, instead backtracking to the West Matukituki River. Climbing to Liverpool Hut, Roger went for a scramble up Mount Barff while the keas entertained us. The trip ended with a pleasant walk down the Matukituki where Mum met us.^{vii}

At about this time Roger and Ann enlarged the house in Battersea Road, doing much of the work themselves.



More house alterations, 2000

When computers arrived in the office, Roger knew it was time to leave local body work. From 1990, he and Ann spent six years in Papua New Guinea with Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA), working in education, health and building maintenance. In December of their first year they wrote from Wabag, a frontier town in Enga Province:

We try to spend Saturday morning in the garden, growing cuttings from many kinds of colourful or flowering plants. Twelve banana 'trees' we planted recently are fascinating to watch as they unfurl their enormous leaves. The soil is excellent for carrots, kaukau and potatoes ...

Outside the rain has stopped and though it is very dark, we can see, beyond the school dormitory lights, a few cooking fires flickering through the trees on the far slopes. Thunder still thumps and rumbles over the ranges to the north, and the sky is continually lit up by tremendous flashes of lightning. In the cool stillness on our verandah we like to stand and watch this awesome display.

Our lives are full and busy and our work rewarding. This is a delightful place to live, among some wonderful people.^{viii}

The Coventrys followed this with two years of similar work with VSA in Malawi, Africa.



Roger with one of the locals, Malawi (1997)

Back in New Zealand, Roger and Ann worked with inmates at Remutaka Prison for a day a week over more than a decade. In 2018 they moved to Cambridge to be near family.

Roger was a committed Christian, skilled and capable in many areas. Ann recalls, 'The tramping was his mainstay. He just loved it!' The Coventry children remember their father's wit; his enjoyment of nonsense poems; his love of music, of hockey and of running; his bushcraft and mountaineering skills; and his unreserved willingness to help anyone with anything.

Sylvia: 'Dad was one of those special people who was put on earth to make it a better place. The mountains were his happy place which he loved so much.'

Marilyn: 'He taught us to love the mountains, and how to walk up hills.'

Jenny: 'We'd start at a walk, then a trot. Not a word or a glance, then faster and faster till breathless at last, we'd all reach the pass! My Dad was a hero in all that he did'.

Geoff: 'He gifted us with adventure'.



Roger Coventry on Mt Reeves, 2006

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- ⁱ What happened, where and to whom at Christmas, *Tararua Trumper* February 1954
 - ⁱⁱ This trip actually happened in 1955/56; see The Club on vacation, *Tararua Trumper* February 1956
 - ⁱⁱⁱ A Real Winter Northern, *Tararua Trumper* October 1955
 - ^{iv} News from Canada, *Tararua Trumper* November 1957
 - ^v Obituary: Roger Coventry, *Tararua Trumper* September 2023
 - ^{vi} Chris Tait 23.8.2023
 - ^{vii} Geoff Coventry 20.8.2023
 - ^{viii} SWTC *Newsletter* December 1990–January 1991