

Snowshoeing in the Two Thumb Range - by Lois McArtney



↑ A snowshoer heading up 'Snake Ridge' towards Beuzenberg Peak. Camp Valley below to the right.

My friend Jude & I recently decided Snowshoeing would be a new adventure worth trying. Not only would it reinforce our 'young at heart' attitudes (with big 0 birthdays fast approaching for both of us!), it would also get us into the snow covered mountains without having to endure the masses of a ski field!

With the long-range weather forecast looking good, and fresh snow in abundance, we were delighted that with only a few days notice, Alpine Recreation had a guide available and we were booked! Although gear can be supplied if required, our tramping gear covered everything on the required list, except we chose their more suitable adjustable ski poles, and of course the snowshoes.

Sunday morning our guide René, checked over our gear, and with boss Gottlieb wishing us well, we were off. We drove around the east side of Lake Tekapo to the fence line beside Mt Gerald station. There we pulled on our packs and set off up towards the Two Thumb range and our base for the next 2 nights - the Rex Simpson hut (5km). Stops to take photos, or watch hares and

even a wallaby, meant it wasn't too onerous for our 'winter' state of fitness. Before long, patches of snow deepened to full ground cover and we were able to strap our snowshoes onto our tramping boots. With some basic instructions from René, we were away, both finding them surprisingly easy to walk in. Fantastic!



↑ Rex Simpson Hut above Lake Tekapo.

After a couple of hours we offloaded our packs by a large protruding rock, and did a side trip to the colourful Camp Hut. We were completely surrounded by snow-covered mountains, and the silence was beautiful! Even at this point we were amused by hare tracks across the snow at regular intervals, and were even entertained as a couple of them showed us their agility over the snow, and pondered us with disdain.

René gave us good instructions on techniques to use snowshoeing up the steeper parts (surprisingly easy with crampon style teeth sitting under the toe of your boot, and therefore easy to dig in), and especially crossing streams. If in doubt easier to have control in your boots, than to crash through a snow

bridge into rocks, uneven surfaces and freezing water with the more clumsy snowshoes on. However this was not required as careful probing with our snow poles found us a safe passage over Camp Stream.



↑ Camp Hut in the Camp Valley.

Returning to our packs, it was only a short distance to the Alpine Recreation owned Rex Simpson Hut. With views of Lake Tekapo behind, and a view of the Southern Alps from the hut window, it felt like luxury accommodation to us! A supply of sleeping bags at this very cosy hut had meant lighter packs for us coming up, and the potbelly stove quickly warmed the interior of our temporary home. Soon we were drinking cups of tea and eating chocolate, and watching the late afternoon sun provide an ever-changing light show over the Southern Alps. It could hardly get any better, until René whipped up a delicious sweet & sour chicken dish with steamed vegetables for our tea. Bliss!

Monday dawned crisp and clear, and an early start had us heading up the saddle behind the hut. We were soon looking up Camp Stream valley, with Gottlieb's coined 'Snake Ridge' leading up to False peak, then the soon to be officially named Beuzenberg Peak (after Erica Beuzenberg, an Alpine Recreation

guide who died tragically in 2006). As we ascended, Mt Cook came fully into view and some venticular cloud moving over it had me pulling out my camera every 5 minutes! Views of Mt Erebus, Lilybank station, and the Godley Valley, shifted as we climbed to better views of Mt D'Archiac, Mt Sibbald and the McCauley Valley.

After a stop for lunch, the chill wind had picked up, so we descended back to the hut for a warming cuppa. Later in the afternoon we strapped on our snowshoes again for an amble along the fence line (all 2 inches showing!). We walked in the direction of the Alps for an hour or so in the warm sunshine and more sheltered lower slopes. That night René again excelled producing a delicious tuna curry for tea, and we entertained each other with stories of various tramps and traveling destinations.

It was lightly snowing when we awoke early on the Monday. With visibility decreasing rapidly as the snow became heavier we opted to head directly out. Being well clad we remained warm and dry, but marveled how the thickening snow could confuse one's senses, and changed the spectacular scenery from the day before to a surreal white world. Even the walk out felt like part of the adventure!

To Gottlieb: At times on this trip we were just 3 tiny figures in a vast, spectacular, pristine wilderness and yet I had a sense of never being more 'alive'. Thank you Gottlieb for your vision that allows us to explore, enjoy and love these mountains too.