

Trip Report - James Thornton

During February myself, Tom Mckellar, Max Olsen, Alexis Belton, George O'Sullivan and Nina Dickerhof went for a tramp in the Glaisnock Wilderness area. The trip was made possible by a grant from the FMC which covered the boat ride to and from the hills west of lake Te Anau, allowing us to get into an area of New Zealand's conservancy I normally wouldn't consider for a tramping trip. I had been on the edge of the Glaisnock wilderness on a trip the previous summer to lake Quill and Sutherland sound and had been keen since to get back in the area. It's beautiful, steep, rugged, wild, wet, remote country. The plan for the trip had been to travel up the castle river, a tributary of the Worsley, find a route out of the head, climb barrier peak, cross to the dark river, travel south and end up somehow at the mouth of the Glaisnock and the north fiord of lake Te Anau. The castle river runs roughly parallel with the famous Clinton valley of the Milford track, and is quite similar in character.

With 12 days supplies, we took a boat across lake Te Anau and made our way up the Worsley, camping that night at the Castle river confluence. Rain, heavy packs and a flooded river slowed us down considerably in travelling to the head of the Castle. With a forecast of some rough weather coming through over the next couple of days, we spent the next morning scouting. We managed to get through a bluff which barred access to gentler slopes above the Castle cirque. The bluff involved a couple of pitches and a nasty traverse across a steep, wet vegetated water course. Dark clouds were brooding to the west, and with an unsure descent we decided to head back down to our camp early afternoon. We spent the next couple of days in our tents as some rough weather came through.

On the third morning after arriving at the head of the castle with a single good day of weather forecasted followed by 'drizzle about the fiords' for the foreseeable future, we decided to set off with day packs and have a crack at Barrier peak, a prominent peak lying between the Castle, Worsley and the Dark river. It was named by the early explorer William Grave's party as it represented for them a barrier to travel further west. Drizzle and poor visibility prevented us from climbing out of the castle cirque until about midday. After a miserable lunch we decided to give the bluff a go, the rock was getting reasonably dry, although visibility was still quite poor. It was only once we were above the bluff that the sun began to pierce through the murk. Barrier peak is a classic Fiordland peak, with steep valley walls which give way to more gently angled terrain, before a final steep summit pyramid. We climbed the south east ridge of the peak, which although at first looked rather imposing, turned out to be an enjoyable scramble on solid granite, arriving at the summit around six in the evening. There was a piece of string tied around a summit cairn rock which turned out to have been left by a friend of ours, Danilo Hegg, who was also in the area.

With only five days left, and a poor forecast out to the west, we headed back down the Castle with plans to spend our remaining time traversing the Franklin mountains south to the Glaisnock. We travelled up saints creek, spent an afternoon climbing the highest peak of the Franklin mountains, point 1785, via the north east ridge, from a camp by an unnamed lake below Mt Kane. The lake, which we began referring to as "Turtle lake" has an island in the middle which looks remarkably like a giant turtle swimming about. Max and Alexis swam out to the island from opposite sides of the lake, and a race ensued as they each attempted to be the first to the top of it. The following day we climbed point 1709 and Mt Kane, before travelling south west along the tops. That night we had a lovely campsite beside a couple of tarns on the tops between Newton and Nitz creek. On the last day of our trip we headed down into the Glaisnock, arriving at Glaisnock hut around lunch time. We spent the rest of the day being driven slightly mad by the heat and the sandflies. A pleasant boat ride the next morning down lake Te Anau's north fiord, through the famous 'narrow's' was a nice way to finish a splendid tramp.

We didn't quite get into the country we initially intended to, but we still had a splendid trip, and I'm now brimming with ideas for further trips into the area. A set of photos Nina took on the trip can be viewed online at '<http://ninadickerhof.smugmug.com/Tramping-in-New-Zealand/Fiordland/Castle-River-Barrier-Peak>'. Thanks FMC for making the trip possible.