

It had taken us just an hour to come from Reeves, and in that time we had lost 1,830 ft. of our morning's climb, so we knew we had a good pull ahead to make up. Saying goodbye to our deer-stalking friends, who were camping close by, we shouldered our swags and were once more on the trail. We went down the river-bank for about 20 chains, first through a small grass clearing and then through the bush track, and then came out on the river-bed.

Several parties have had some trouble picking up the track ahead at this point, but we were well informed, and immediately on striking the river-bed we kept our eyes open for signs on the other side. We soon located an opening in the birch-trees, with a small notice tacked up to an adjoining tree. The river was too deep to cross dry-footed, so one of our party took off his boots and carried the others across. This looked so comical that the camera fiend took a record.

Starting up the other side we found that all reports about the track were true. It was a stiff pull and no mistake, and to make things worse, the recent packing had made the track muddy. Our boots became clogged and made the going very heavy. Up we went with numerous spells, occasionally glancing at the barometer to see how we were faring. At last, at an altitude of 3,320 ft., or 2,200 ft. above the Tauherenikau, we came out on to an open rocky knob, where we were able to enjoy a good view after an hour and three-quarters climb. The peep down the Tauherenikau was particularly fine. Mount Reeves stood out plainly on the other side, and we had the satisfaction of knowing that we had more than caught up what we had lost in height before lunch. The much-discussed Cone Ridge stood out right in front of us, with Mount Holdsworth away beyond.

Our swags were beginning to feel heavy, but the barometer gave us a good deal of hope by showing us that Omega was only about 350 ft. above us. The back ranges were wonderfully clear, and we only hoped that we would get such another day on the morrow.

Pushing onward again, we climbed up a steep pinch and came out on to the flat swampy top known as Bull Mound. Here the horse-track turns down to the left to avoid the bog. We had been advised to keep along the open top and pick up the track again farther on, as it was better walking. Peeping out amongst the bog we saw the first of the pretty gentian mountain-flowers which are so noticeable along the Hector Ridge. The top is fairly clear, with a few small patches of scrub, and when we came to a harder surface we picked up the horse-track again, and soon the smell of burnt birch denoted a camp-site somewhere in the vicinity. Sure enough, in a little cosy corner, we struck the tent belonging to the men who were erecting the hut under Alpha. We debated whether to boil the billy here, but the afternoon was drawing on and we still had some distance to go. However, we had some chocolate and biscuits, and shouldered our swags again.

The ridge rises a little, still open along the top to a rocky knoll. We thought at first that this was Omega Trig., but decided afterwards that Omega was the scrubby knob a little distance ahead, which appeared a little higher in altitude. After leaving the rocky knoll the track makes over to the right of the spur, cuts into the scrub, and drops down into a well-defined saddle 350 ft. below in the direction of Alpha.

We were now on the main range, as the summit runs from Rimutaka over Mount Marchant to Omega, and then takes a big bend to the west to Alpha and on to Mount Hector. From the saddle there is a sharp rise up a zigzag, which the men who were making the track named "Hell's Gates." We were getting tired, and did not wonder at the name after we had climbed the 595 ft. to the top. Down the other side the grade is much easier, and we could see Alpha standing out ahead of us, with our proposed camping-place inside the edge of the bush below. The sight of the end of our long day's journey cheered us up, and we commenced to step it out, singing at the tops of our voices, when we suddenly ran into the hut-builders returning to their camp under Omega, and we shut up like rat-traps. We had a yarn with them, and then dropped gradually down to a flat saddle 365 ft. lower than the knob we had just passed over, and then started an easy climb towards Alpha. A short distance ahead chips on the track denoted the site of the hut, which was only just commenced, and five minutes later we came to an open space in the scrubby bush, where a couple of old tent-poles and the charred logs of an old fire told us that we had at last reached our camping-spot.

It had taken us three hours and fifty minutes from the Tauherenikau River. It was just 6 o'clock, with the atmosphere almost down to freezing, betokening with the clear sky a frosty night. Whilst two of the party pitched the tent, the other went for water. The best place is about three minutes' walk up the track, just outside the bush on the right. There is a small watercourse which appears dry, but a search discovers a little pool under an overhanging flax-bush. It did not take us long to get the tent pitched, as it was slung on a rope, but it was nearly dark by the time we had cut the scrub for the bunk.

The beauty of the alpine cooker now asserted itself, for we tied the tent-door, sat on our swags, and had a three-course dinner in no time. It also warmed up the tent and made things very comfortable. After we had finished tea we lit our pipes and strolled around in the moonlight gathering odd bits of dead timber. After a good deal of coaxing we managed to get a fire going, and sat toasting our toes and yarning over the day's journey.

It was a perfect night outside, but very chilly; not a cloud in the sky, and a full moon lighting up the landscape with most glorious effects. We turned in early and slept soundly for about five hours. Then the cold awakened us, and each one tried to persuade the others to get up and replenish the fire. As the man that got up stood a good chance of losing his blankets, no move was made.

We dozed off and on at intervals until daylight, when a puff of wind on the tent brought us all to attention. Northerly breeze—this meant mist on the ranges. We rose and had a look around. Northerly breeze all right, with mist creeping through the range just south of Mount Holdsworth: we must be away at once.