

We watched the sun rise over the Maungarakis, away on the far side of the Wairarapa flats, and kept an anxious eye on Mount Hector for signs of mist whilst we were cooking breakfast. We soon packed up our gear, and shortly after 8 a.m. were on our way to Alpha. It was a glorious morning; the ground was hard with frost, and the atmosphere was most exhilarating.

A few minutes brought us to the edge of the bush, and it was most interesting to notice how the limbs of the stunted birch-trees were clothed with moss right to the very tips. Long icicles hung down from a damp bank, and the snow-grass glistened in the sunlight as if covered with diamonds.

In half an hour we were on the summit of Alpha, 720 ft. above our camp, and stopped to admire the most beautiful panoramas spread out before us. All the principal features of the Wairarapa were spread out like a map, with the sea showing up away in the distance. Wellington appeared no distance away looking right down the Hutt Valley. Kapiti Island stood out in bold relief, with the South Island beyond. The coast-line from Otaki north could be easily discerned curving around and disappearing in the distance towards Wanganui. It was too hazy to the north to discern Mount Egmont or Mount Ruapehu, although the main range as far as Mount Dundas stood out very clearly in the morning light. Looking to the south the main spur leading down over Quoin to the Otaki Forks showed out very distinctly, and one of our party, who had made the trip from Kaitoke the previous year, was able to point out the route he had followed on that occasion.

We could have spent some time drinking in the view, but all the time we were watching Mount Hector with anxious eyes. Leaving Alpha we dropped 360 ft. to a saddle, and on the way down came across the first patches of the interesting edelweiss which is so much beloved by alpine climbers. The botanist is in his glory rambling along the mountain-tops, as every step brings into view some interesting alpine growth.

A little farther ahead we came to the first of the tarns which are such a feature along the top of the Tararuas. A steady climb ahead for some time and a turn to the west brought us to a prominent knob, from which a long high ridge branches off towards Renata and Kapakapanui, one hour and twenty-five minutes' journey from camp. This knob is 40 ft. higher than Alpha, but so far is not named. The ridge ahead veers around sharply to the north, forming an easy-sloping semicircular curve, which has the appearance of a large dress-circle.

Mist was now beginning to collect around the top of Hector, so we plugged steadily ahead through the snow-grass, passed over a small knob, and dropped slightly to a saddle 700 ft. lower than Hector. We brought out the emergency rations of prunes and chocolate, and each keeping a prune-stone in his mouth to suck, we made up a narrow ridge to another prominent knob, where we found ourselves in the mist. From this point a long spur runs out in a south-easterly direction into the head of the Tauherenikau River, and is one of the places where a party coming from Hector to Alpha would be likely to go wrong in a mist. The other place is the ridge leading to Renata, where there is also a change in the general direction of the main ridge, with a long spur running out. We could follow the main ridge without much difficulty, as we were rising all the time.

The track committee intend at some future date to pare a line through the tussocks over these knobs to act as a guide; and this should be most useful to any parties caught in the mist on the way along the ridge.

The barometer showed we were not far below Hector, and by and by a round knob loomed up through the mist like a gigantic beehive. We scrambled up, thinking we had reached Hector, but discovered no cairn, so we dropped down the other side and saw another beehive ahead; scrambled up this to find we were again disappointed, and immediately ahead we scaled a third beehive. This was getting monotonous, so we looked at the barometer and discovered we still had about 150 ft. to ascend. Finally, we saw a bigger mound ahead showing dimly through the mist, and a few minutes later reached the cairn—three hours' tramp from our camp.

We could not see more than a few chains ahead, so only stopped long enough to put our names on a piece of paper and insert it in a bottle which contained many others.

A lift in the mist showed us a tarn in a basin to the north, so we descended and found the tarn was really a spring situated in a basin alongside a prominent rock. The alpine cooker soon had some tomato-soup and fried whitebait ready, and we sat down to enjoy our lunch. We were just about on the lower level of the mist, and as we were having our meal it kept lifting up and down like a curtain, giving us most charming views of the main range north, with Mount Holdsworth, Mitre Peak, Mount Dundas, and Mount Crawford showing out more prominently amongst a mass of broken ridges. The mist still covered the top of Hector, and seemed to keep to the basin at the head of the streams running down into the Waiotauru River.

We had a good spell, enjoying our smoke, spread out on the snow-grass in the sunshine. This would be a glorious spot for a hut, though the absence of firewood would necessitate parties bringing a cooker of some description.

There is another tarn on the south side of Hector, to the east of the ridge before the first beehive from Hector is reached, which we passed in the mist, where several parties have camped and put the night in on their journey through. Our spring is 500 ft. below Hector, almost directly north, a little higher than the saddle between it and the west peak, and a bit to the right. There are also other tarns quite handy to the ridge just below the saddle on each side.

As we packed up our things again after lunch the mist lifted, and we could see the west peak standing out ahead. Sidling round to the saddle 555 ft. below Hector, we ascended the west peak, and found that it was only 155 ft. lower than the trig.

For some distance ahead the ridge, which is still the main Tararua Range, widens out, dropping suddenly on the west and running out in easy basins on the east, with a succession of tarns nestling amongst the snow-grass. We thoroughly enjoyed this part of the journey, rambling