

YOUR OUTDOOR TRIPS

on the philosophy that newcomers will soon learn from their mistakes, but there are kinder approaches.

An important part of trip preparation is making sure that each person has suitable clothing and footwear. Running shoes are fine on well-formed tracks, but on rough ground, boots give better support and protection. Wearing two pairs of socks decreases the chance of blisters, but it pays to put sticking plaster on any spots which are starting to rub.

A waterproof, windproof outer layer is essential. Light nylon parkas and padded jackets are windproof, but are not much use if it's really raining. Waterproof overtrousers keep out some rain and wind, but many trampers wear shorts in the bush, even in wet weather. Less vigorous parties usually prefer woollen, corduroy or tracksuit trousers. Shirts and jerseys should be warm and retain their insulating properties when wet. Wool is excellent, as is Dacron Fibrepile. This fast-drying synthetic, specially designed for outdoor use is however, not as windproof as wool. For trips above the bushline, or in cold weather, a hat is essential to minimise heat loss from the head.

Hypothermia can kill

Warm, waterproof clothing is important, not only for the comfort it provides in bad weather, but because it helps prevent hypothermia or exposure. Hypothermia has been the cause of many deaths in the New Zealand bush, even in recent years. It occurs if persons lose body heat faster than they can produce it. Improper clothing, poor leadership and bad weather are the main contributing factors, but body shape and general state of health also make some people more susceptible than others. If a party is well-equipped with the right clothing and high-energy foods, if all the members are healthy and fit enough for the trip, and if they act sensibly, then they can continue quite safely, even in appalling weather. But notice all those 'ifs'.

It's very important to watch for early signs of hypothermia — shivering, weariness, clumsiness and slow or atypical responses. If any person is showing any of the above signs, it is essential to take action. Arrange temporary shelter, have high-energy snacks, and put on more warm clothing. The party will also need to consider changing their plans to reduce the chances of people getting any colder. Options may include dropping to lower altitudes, turning back, heading for a hut or staying out of rivers. Prompt action may prevent a serious situation developing. It's much easier to prevent hypothermia than to treat it. People have died without even complaining of feeling cold.

Another important pre-trip task is to leave written details of the trip with a responsible contact person. There are all sorts of reasons why a party may be late back, even on short trips. If this happens,



Photo: A. P. Druce

Rain gear and warm clothing are essential on more extended walks — especially if you want to stop and botanise. Herangi Range summit — North Taranaki.

the contact person can then reassure anxious relatives in the short term, and contact the Search and Rescue authorities if the delay becomes more serious.

Leadership

Competent leadership in the field is the second vital ingredient for a party's well-being and enjoyment. It's easy to lead a small group of enthusiastic people on a well-formed track in fine weather. However, if the weather is bad, if the navigation is tricky, if the party is very large, or if people have differing expectations of the trip, then effective leadership presents much more of a challenge. Such time-honoured rules as setting a suitable pace, allowing time for rests, keeping the party together, and watching the weather have proved themselves over and over again.

Many of the leader's tasks are much easier in a small party. It takes less time to keep people informed of decisions and to give them information about the area they are passing through. People on large groups have often felt irritated at missing talks or descriptions when they hadn't caught up with the guide or leader, or when they were too far back in the crowd to hear properly. Competent, experienced leaders can manage large parties, but even they may feel the strain. Splitting a large party into groups of about 12 people under separate leaders may make the day more enjoyable for everyone.

Many people worry about having to cope with a major accident in the bush; others don't worry enough. Serious accidents are rare however, and walking parties are more likely to have to cope with cramp, strains and sprains, heat exhaustion, nettle poisoning or burns. But in the event of a heart attack or a near-drowning, such skills as cardiopulmonary resuscitation may save a life. Bush users with limited first aid experience would be wise to do a first aid

course and carry some first aid instructions. Federated Mountain Club's booklet, *Safety in the Mountains*, will fit into a parka pocket. A first aid kit is useful, though it's surprising what you can improvise with if you have to. Basic first aid supplies include sticking plaster, dressing strips, Panadeine, a crepe bandage and pins, sunburn protection cream and antiseptic cream. Larger parties will probably decide to carry a more extensive kit, and possibly a more detailed set of instructions like those in the N.Z. Mountain Safety Council's recent publication *Outdoor First Aid*. If the leader is not an experienced first aider, then it's important to discover during the pre-trip planning who will be able to take charge if an accident or medical emergency does occur.

If things go wrong

No matter how thorough the planning and preparation, and how careful the leadership, the unexpected can still happen. Such situations require calm and confident leadership. If there has been a serious accident, or if someone has been missing for some time and retracing the route has not located them, then the leader may decide to send for help. It's preferable that two people go, taking a written message. This should state what has happened, who is involved, where they are and what action has already been taken or is planned. The Search and Rescue Organisation really appreciate receiving lots of information. As there may be a delay before help arrives, it is up to the leader to help everyone remain calm. Remaining calm is also vital if you happen to be the one who is lost. Find shelter and do your best to stay warm and dry. This is much easier if you are carrying a survival bag or large plastic sheet. You can either curl up inside it or use it to construct an emergency shelter.