

THE FOX VIEW

ALPINE GUIDES FOX GLACIER

Issue 2

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From Chancellor to the Sea

Later this year Alpine Guides Westland (AGW) will be given television coverage on a programme called Adventure Guide TV.

A small Auckland production company called Colour Films approached AGW, looking for suggestions for an adventure involving guides on their days off. They also wanted to show AGW's products and philosophy.

Craig Cardie, a senior guide with AGW, floated the idea of a group of glacier guides joining forces with rafting guides for a journey from the main divide, down the Fox Glacier and out to the Tasman sea.

Colour Films liked the idea so came to Fox Glacier in February to record the trip. The film crew had to come and go several times as the weather was not settled enough for the trip to go ahead, until early March. The Team was Craig Cardie, Tracey Bean and Brigid Anderson, with Adrian Fogg, Rivers Wild Franz Josef, who guided the rafting section. Abel Roche was head of safety. The trip was an ascent of Chancellor Dome near the head of the Fox Glacier, then a journey



down the lower Fox finishing off with a raft trip out to Gillespies Beach and the Tasman Sea.

On the beach they ate smoked salmon beside a bonfire and savoured a perfect evening in a perfect place.

Craig feels the trip went really well and a highlight was a bivvy in a crevasse in an area of the glacier called Vic gap. For the glacier guides, rafting the Fox River was not only thrilling because of the grade 4 rapids, but to float down the river issuing from the glacier they spend so much time walking on, gave the trip a quirky spin.

Ice Climbing Instruction Day

AGW Guide Craig Cardie is shown some of the finer points of ice climbing technique on a Guides ice climbing instruction day. Allan Uren, one of New Zealand's finest climbers and shown belaying in the photo, is the instructor. He also moonlights as the AGW maintenance man and newsletter editor. These ice climbing instruction days have a twin pronged benefit as they enable the guides to better teach ice climbing and also increase their own skill level for their personal climbing.

Alpine Guides runs ice climbing instruction days where the maximum guide to pupil ratio is 1:4, ensuring that you receive close personal attention.



Marius takes up the Challenge

A 10km run, 25km paddle, 90km mountain bike ride, in the dead of night, from sea level to 790 m, capped off by an 8 hour tramp, may not sound like the most relaxing of weekends off work. But recently Marius Bron, the lead guide for AGW, took part in a multi-sport race "Rollo's Nelson Adventure Race" which Bron says "I'd love to do again."

Marius was part of a four man team dubbed Team Fox Guides, after the entry fee of \$700.00 was paid by AGW. There were 28 teams with 4 members, with 23 of the 28 teams finishing. Team Fox came in 20th.

There was some stiff competition in the race from professional teams, such as the Seagate team who have won the prestigious Southern Traverse race. They also won this race in 15 hours.

Now back at work he's recovering from a moderate case of RSI in his wrist from paddling. It seems some guides will do anything to get out of cutting steps.



Lower Glacier Guides Course

Shaun Norman, UIAGM Mountain Guides 20 April 2004

On Monday 5 April – 8am at the New Zealand Alpine Club Hut, Fox Glacier, the Chief Fox Guide Marius and I met eight very presentable, albeit slightly nervous guides. They were lining up for Lower Glacier Guide assessment. They had heard stories of Assessors grilling hapless trainees! I hoped that my introductory words would put them at ease.

Marius and I had three days in which to see a solid display of skills in White Ice Guiding. This type of work is the bread and butter of Glacier Guides. Come rain, or sun, it has to be performed endlessly and flawlessly for thousands of visitors each year. I expected to see an excellent effort – I wasn't disappointed.

We assessors used the 'Self and Peer' model with each topic so the "assessee" under examination, together with their 'students' or 'clients', analysed their lesson – essentially marking themselves.

Whilst Lower Glacier Guide Assessment does not set out to train, an inevitable (and valuable) sideline is that demonstrations lead to discussion. To have 10 guides working as a group is a rare, yet stimulating event.



Fox Glacier, taken from the top of the Alpine Guides track

The Franz Josef Glacier laid on a windy, clear day for cramponing and ice climbing. In between our assessments, it was interesting to see the step lines and conduct of the other guiding companies. Indeed, terrain analysis of these lines produced some thoughtful comment! This was a fun day, with sun baking the group. They learned, not only the ice climbers 'Uren Bunny Hop', but, in one of the '5 minute presentations', the Hebrew phrase for "Please hold onto the chain".

At 4 pm the group learned they had all passed – from well to very well indeed! Brief individual interviews were held; mark and comment sheets distributed – and 8 Guides ability endorsed on their road to full qualification. I have to commend everyone involved – for the Guides' attitude and preparation and for AGW's support. A fine result.

OSH finds Benchmark Safety Practices at AGW

By their very nature, adventure tourist activities in New Zealand have an element of unknown risk. This is part of the attraction for visitors to New Zealand in that they can experience exciting non-theme park adventures where, to the best of the operators ability, they can go out and be challenged in nature yet with the risk of injury being low.

AGW is one of the best at delivering an outdoors experience and taking pride in not draping their clients in a coating of cotton wool so they can get the full experience on one of New Zealand's raw natural wonders. They're not a nervous parent operation that's always yelling at their children to 'Get down off there - you'll hurt yourself'!

Equally the company has a healthy attitude towards the health and safety of their employees. They have made a concentrated effort to identify work hazards, but without taking away the responsibility that we all have for looking after our own well-being.

Recently the Occupational Safety and Health Service (OSH) visited AGW. One of the reasons for the visit was to see how a glacier guiding company operating under the banner of the UIAGM for the training of its guides, was managing hazards. Because there are only three companies in New Zealand operating as glacier guides it is difficult to get a clear idea about what are acceptable hazards in this volatile environment.

For all that, the three OSH inspectors were more than happy by what they found after a tour of AGW's building and the glacier. In a report they stated, "Overall, it is clear to me that all health and safety matters are being managed to a high standard and you and your employees efforts should be commended for their efforts."

Colin Peterson

Colin Peterson who has been with AGW since 1996 has left to join his wife Sue, who has recently become the St John's ambulance station manager in Hokitika. Our best wishes to them both on this next chapter.

Colin was Kerie Uren's (the guiding operations manager) right hand man and will be sorely missed. The gap he leaves is not only due to his dedication to the job but being an older man there was his wise council. This is a key aspect of AGW in that age and experience is a valued commodity.



Ben Corcoran, the OSH officer for AGW playing it safe



Fox Alpine Rescue Team Takes Steps Towards Becoming Gazetted

Without AGW guides there wouldn't be a current Alpine Rescue Team on the West Coast. In the last 2 years Abel Roche, the assistant lead guide, has built the team from AGW employees into a viable unit that can execute rescues above the bush line on the western side of the Southern Alps from Haast to Nelson.

In April, the team found out they had become recognised by the Police (who handle land-based SAR operations) as the ones they would call for a call out covering the Tasman district. This is the first step to becoming gazetted, which would mean the team is recognised nationally as the team responsible for alpine rescue for the district.

Mini Building Boom

The building boom in Fox Glacier headed by AGW is continuing this winter, with the planned construction for more staff accommodation in both Fox and possibly Franz Josef Glacier townships.

The accommodation in Fox Glacier is being built by the Te Weheka Lodge partners which Mike and Carrol Browne are part of. For the last few years the Brownes have let out two of their guides houses to Te Weheka and claiming these back will most likely solve the lack of staff accommodation.

Due to the growth of AGW the base

building seemed to shrink in size, especially upstairs in the administration area. A plan is in place to extend the office space out over the Hobnail Cafe thereby giving the hardworking folk upstairs room to swing a cat.

Remodeling will also occur downstairs, with the counter where bookings are taken being extended. Fox Glacier Heli-Services share this counter and after the extension will have their own partitioned space.

Mike Browne estimates \$250,000 will be spent on these projects.

Rebecca's New Position

Recently AGW has shaken up their marketing strategies by forming a new marketing team.

Rebecca Morgan who heads the team says the company would like to streamline the publications they advertise with, make sure that long serving customers are being looked after and that all marketing material reflects a world class company.

Rebecca is ideally suited to this position as she has spent four years handling the independent traveller and tour group reservations; she has also had experience in managing agents' accounts. This has given her a good view of the big picture. Carrol Browne will still look after the brand, with the marketing team attending to the finer details.



Guides accommodation has moved on from the loyal house truck (being towed by Peter Browne)



- Rain for the month 368 mm (max 90mm on the 11th)
- Average max temp 17 deg (24 deg on the 24th)
- Average min temp 7 deg (1 deg on the 25th, 29th, 30th) with ground frosts experienced on those days.

WEATHER STATS FOR MARCH '04

As an example of how difficult the weather can be here is part of the report for the heli-hiking operations for March.

This month we only had a measly 9 full flying days, another 9 days we managed 1 or 2 trips for the day and the remaining 13 were cancelled altogether. Once again the southwesterly pattern was the dominating one with northwesterly and westerly close behind. The southwesterly brings a mixed bag as to whether trips go.

All but 1 of the northwesterly days were cancelled due to rain and the one day that wasn't was very much a headache day with the cloud rolling in and out. The tricky days are often the westerly when things happen really fast. Two days in a row I had big headaches with the first day sneaking a group in then that was the last of the blue sky we saw all day.

We had a good run of summer weather at the end of the month with a southerly flow and a big High moving on.

Excerpts from Fiona Anderson's monthly weather report for March '04

Guides Dodge Brick Thrown by Monkey

The end of the summer guiding season has seen an exodus of guides heading to Nepal on climbing adventures. So far there have been letters home of sickness, riots and a brick throwing monkey. It is a long way from the calmness of the West Coast of New Zealand.

Certainly the adventures have started before even reaching the mountains. A letter from Abel Roche describes the start of his first journey to a third world country.

3 April

Well I'm in Katmandu. This place is unreal, there is poverty like you would not believe. Kids digging in the mud and rubbish looking for food, little shacks and beggars living in the street.

The traffic is crazy with rickshaws competing with cars, there doesn't seem to be any road rules. Riding in a rickshaw is a leap of faith, you just get in and hold on. More concerning are the soldiers with guns.

I wonder what they think of us?

The airline has lost my bag with all my climbing gear, sleeping bag and boots.

I was going to replace some gear today but there was a riot yesterday and now a strike so all the shops are closed. But you know me – still happy and Jeff ever optimistically says we still have plan no. 23.

Hope all is well, Abel.

The group left in late March for a three month climbing holiday, in



which they hope to climb a number of trekking peaks up to 6500 m high.

In an email from another guide Pip Russell, she expands on the protest come riot that Abel talked about and the brick throwing monkey.

The day we arrived there had been a big protest at the Royal Palace and there were guns everywhere. We were driving along behind a truck, with army dudes in it, with their guns laying in their laps. It seemed they were pointing them straight at our driver and Tony (another guide) in the front seat! We had to dodge a brick a monkey threw at the road from a roof top . . .

Love Pip

A week later Abel writes again.

Well I got my bag back but it almost killed me.

When we flew to Lukla I had to wait for my bag, the rest of the group went on. I

was going to catch them up in two days at Namche Bazaar. But I became extremely sick. Like you wouldn't believe. Continuous vomiting and diarrhoea, so bad I was reduced to lying on the side of the track. Yak herders were wandering past probably thinking dumb tourist.

I dragged myself into Namche and collapsed. Thanks to Emily's drugs I feel a little better and today we're going higher.

See ya, Abel.

It sounds like mountaineering will almost be safer, here's hoping they're all well.

Welcome New Staff

We are very pleased to be able to welcome -

Stephanie Barker

Suzie O'Connor

Nigel Cooper

Gavin Dorsett

to the Alpine Guides Team. They are each making a grand contribution in their own way.