



*The Life and Times of the*

*Avoca Hut*

*Why, how,  
who and when*

Compiled on behalf of the  
Canterbury University Tramping Club  
by Fred de Zwart, 2002

The Avoca hut was built in 1947 by the Canterbury University College Tramping Club (CUCTC) in an effort to “return the continuous courtesy of other alpine clubs in New Zealand.” The fact that this hut is still standing after more than half a century of nature’s abuse is testament to the outstanding efforts of the club members who designed and built it.

So that is what it got. The first attempt went wrong from the start, with only one car and four people, instead of the expected two cars and five people. So the barrel spent a bit more time in a Christchurch garage before the second and successful attempt was carried out. The 200 l barrel was squashed in to a small car, and three CUTC members, Fred de Zwart, Phil Barclay and Steve Fortune, joined it for a midnight drive to Klondyke Corner before setting off over Jordan Saddle the next day.

The journey the barrel made was as interesting as you would expect, considering what we carried. And at the end of the day, the old chimney and water tanks were removed, and the new ones installed.



The barrel slowly makes its way up the Avoca Valley, accompanied by Fred de Zwart (left) and Steve Fortune.

This journal is a tribute to the impressive efforts of the trampers who built this hut, and serves as a record of the history of it. Thanks go to everyone who has supported me with information, time and energy, but especially to the concise and complete notes and minutes left by the committee and members of CUCTC in the late 1940s.

Please enjoy your stay at this hut, and enjoy this special part of New Zealand.

During the late 1960's, New Zealand changed to a metric currency system and the Avoca Hut was given a book value of \$20. It appears that the hut has not been valued since then so that may well be its current value

During 1968, the hut was given a treat, with a new toilet being dug and the fibreglass section of roof added.

Over Queens' Birthday, 1969, in good New Zealand tradition, a 21<sup>st</sup> party was held. There are no other records of this event, so it appears that it was celebrated in true drunken style.

In 1974 the club obtained a Colin Clarkes Grant to cover the purchase of a shovel, broom, chimney and concrete. This was flown in, and by mid 1975 the Avoca Hut sported a flash new concrete floor. A new set of bunks were next on the shopping list, and after a number of postponements, these were also added to the hut. At least one of the bunks was made inside the hut, or else the hut was built around the bunk, because even if the doors are removed from the hut, the bunk does not fit through the door.

An attempt to get a 4x4 vehicle near the Avoca hut was attempted by CUTC in the mid 90s. This trip is recorded in a TROG, and appears to have been a complete disaster, with numerous mechanical failures occurring, and the hut not being reached.

# Prehistory

To know where you are, you really need to know where you've come from. A donation for a bivvy of £4 was made to the Canterbury University College Tramping Club (CUCTC) in 1943. Who that kind benefactor was has long since been lost in the clouds of history, but that action is ultimately responsible for the existence of the Avoca Hut. To give an idea of the cost, £3 was the cost of a ferry ticket from Wellington to Christchurch, and £4 was the average weekly wage at the time.

The money sat quietly within the accounts of CUCTC until 1946, when it was questioned. Not long after that, the idea of a bivvy was discussed at great length. The members of the committee agreed that the club had an obligation to return the continuous courtesy of other alpine clubs in the country, particularly the CMC (Canterbury Mountaineering Club) and the NZAC (New Zealand Alpine Club), and that a bivvy was the most desirable solution.

The Hawdon valley was decided on. A couple of months later, the club heard rumour that a hut had recently been built in the Hawdon valley, and instead the head of the Avoca Valley was chosen as the site of the bivvy.

## Life since then...



Installation of the fireplace, 1948.



A pointless bridge over the Avoca river, built during Easter 1948.

In the years immediately after the Avoca Hut was built, the CUCTC was a frequent visitor to the area.

In Easter, 1948, about 70 bodies joined together and laid siege on the Avoca valley. Part of the plans were to install the fire place into the hut, and do the finishing touches to the hut. Despite this, much of the time was spent trying to keep dry or building bridges over the Avoca river.

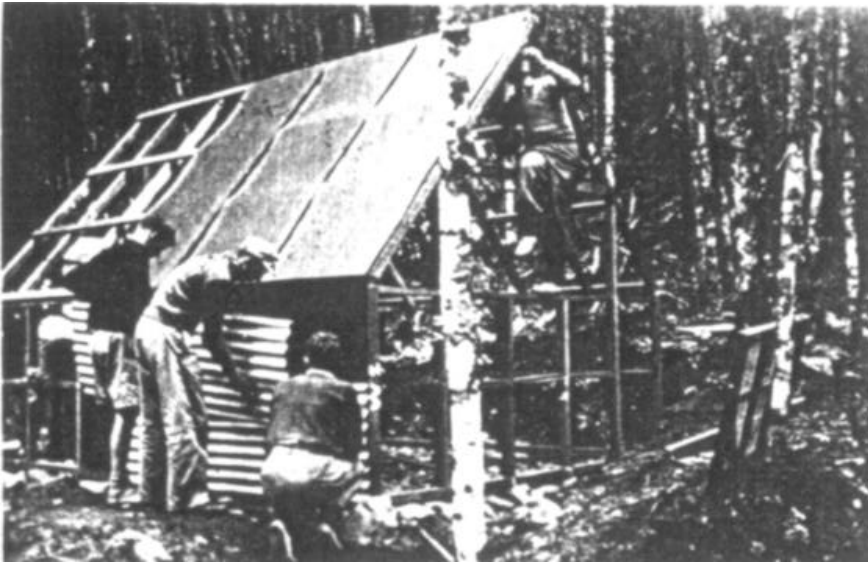
On Thursday, the party split up, with four members returning to Arthurs Pass, five following the Avoca River to Lake Coleridge to start transporting material, and one person left to look after the camp:

“A screaming North West wind dispelled all hopes of carrying corrugated iron so we loaded up with about 120 lbs (55kg) of timber between four of us and left at 3.45. The return trip took 4 ½ hrs via a route high above Lake Lilian and



The site for the bivvy was cleared.

"Dave, John, Dave, Joe and Bill left at 7:45 on Thursday morning for the Jordan Saddle. Pete Alan and Murray left for the head of the lake at 12, camping the night by the lake. The six of us left worked 'til dark, and completed all the practical work necessary for a Sheet Workers' Certificate."



The Avoca Bivvy takes it's present shape.

nightmare was overseen by Bill Packard, who had carried out research for his thesis in the area. After the first day of moving material up the Avoca valley, the second day dawned:

"The first ones were up at 5:15, and the mass of the party were off by 8:35 laden with sheets of corrugated iron and certain essential personal gear. In perfectly calm weather (thank God) we staggered up the boiling valley - having lunch at the up valley end of Lake Lilian, - and making the food and tents pitched the previous night (where Back Basin Hut now stands) between 3:30 and 4:30."



Material for the bivvy is carried over the Harper river.



A copy of this booklet can be found on the Canterbury University Tramping Club web site, <[www.cutc.canterbury.ac.nz](http://www.cutc.canterbury.ac.nz)>, or by contacting the Canterbury University Tramping Club, c/o Canterbury University Students' Association, and may be copied and distributed at will. First produced in 2002.



Mark Younger (left) and Phil Barclay enjoy the fumes as they redecorate the interior of the Avoca hut.



The painters; Fred, Phil, Mark, Stew and Floriane, left their signatures in the hut.

And to complete the renovations to the Avoca hut, five eager souls lugged packs full of the usual gear, and then 4 litres of paint each, over the Jordan Saddle in February 2001. Easily the heaviest pack I've ever carried, and I don't plan to do it again!



In March 2000, a trip was made to see the condition of the hut. A few notes were taken, and a few months later, another trip to the hut went out. This one was to see how realistic the Jordan Saddle route was with lots of gear. The trip was a success, and a shopping list was made. A new water tank, a new chimney, a toilet seat, a few minor repairs, and a nice paint job were what was needed. Then the email went out, requesting gifts of chimneys, water tanks, toilet seats and paint. A reply with an offer of paint was receiving, and a chimney followed soon after. A water tank slowly made its way into the club's possession. A bit more work was required for the toilet seat, but a slightly damaged seat was obtained after a bit of searching.



Steve Fortune gets squashed between the barrel and a tree, as the barrel makes its way up the Jordan river.

Applications for funding were made, and a further £25 was obtained from the Canterbury University College Students' Association while a £10 grant was received from the Department of Internal Affairs, going towards fitting the hut with a fireplace, bunks, billies and an axe.

The plans for the building were drafted by Engineering Students in the club, and then the preparations were made. Wood was found, and corrugated iron was collected.

## Building

As appears to be standard student behaviour, a mission of ridiculous proportions was attempted after the final exams: a bivvy would be built.

First, a party of ten club members, led by Don Taylor, spent November 1<sup>st</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> preparing the foundations for the bivvy.

"In the afternoon work on the foundations was commenced. This continued in glorious weather throughout Tuesday and Wednesday with the result that by Wednesday night most of us were blistered and gashed in one way or another, a good foundation and system of drains had been made, tracks out from the meadow and to a hole about 50 yds (45m) above the site, a rack constructed and a 'bike shed' of sorts excavated in the hillside."

A party of five made the trek to the hut during Easter 1950, to carry out repairs to the bunks, and clear some trees around the area. By the sounds of things, this trip was full of adventure, with two CMC (Canterbury Mountaineering Club) members being rescued off the face of Mt Greenlaw, and a search for Gizeh Col led the party to the Avoca Col instead. The party opted for a return to the hut, but of course, the river was a foot higher, and ropes were needed to cross the Avoca. The party eventually made it out of the Avoca via Lake Coleridge in the rain.

During the Easter of 1952, a total of 47 CUCTC members in eight different parties visited the area. This was repeated again in 1954.

In 1955, the energies and enthusiasm of club members shifted focus to the Lewis Pass, where the original Ada Pass Hut was built. This hut was maintained by the club for a number of years, but became too small for the site, and a larger hut was built.

The Avoca hut was debated often in the committee meetings of the CUCTC. A water tank was suggested, but the then current water supply (a 50 metre walk to a small creek) was seen as adequate, so nothing was done. Not long afterwards, the need for some track maintenance was noted, and that a new chimney was required.

six ruined people reached camp and burnt macaroni in the dark and the beginning of rain. The cook suffered some concentrated abuse."

The silliness continued, and the next day the timber was carried up to the bivvy site, before the party headed off over the Jordan Saddle. By this stage, the weather had deteriorated, with rain raising the level of the Jordan river. The problems escalated, resulting in two members of the party spending a cold and miserable night halfway up the Jordan River. Of course, the weather had a little bit more in store for the weary students:

"Well Saturday it snowed!! Pat (Kelleher) and I (Don Taylor) stepped out into 9 inches of brand new snow to search for the two 'benighted' at 8:30 to be greeted by their hale. The sweetest sound we ever heard!"

A week later, starting on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November 1947, a total of 26 club members transported the remaining material from the head of Lake Coleridge, and built the Avoca Bivvy. This managerial



Bill Packard takes a rest.

"Up as usual at 5:15, the three men went up to bivvy, and finished off panel beating. The girls went on ahead and at 12:15 we lunched up the Galilee and had reached the Pass at 10 pm."

"So the bivvy was built."

At this time it was also agreed that the bivvy would now be called a hut.



The Avoca hut looking much like it does now.

The next day, some of the party headed on up the valley, while the rest returned to Lake Coleridge to pick more building material.

"We said farewell to the head of the lake - and again walked up the Harper - this time 10' - 14' (3-4m) wide instead of the 8' of the previous day. John Bushell and party had met us at the head of the lake and had started up valley, but we caught them up and passed them, most of the bods arriving at



The Avoca valley is a long valley, made longer by the presence of corrugated iron on one's back.

Back Basins Creek camp between 7 and 7:30. The girls had cooked a super meal, and all retired to bed under the stars, well satisfied with the day's work."

"Monday morning 17<sup>th</sup> dawned calm and clear. Brian and Geoff left for Arthurs Pass via the Jordan Saddle at 6:30. We had lunch at the meadow, and while some carted the loads up to the site, the rest went down to the Back Basins' Creek and packed another load part way up towards the site. An excellent dinner was had at 7, and again we slept heavily under a clear sky."

"On Tuesday Clive and Terry left at 6:45 for Jordan Saddle, followed by Peter, Trevor, Bruce, Ken and Denys, all of whom took a load up as far as Galilee Creek before crossing to the Waimak. The rest of us broke camp, and laden with tents etc., as well as bivvy materials made our way up to the meadow where we had lunch and pitched camp. The males got tea while the girls clambered around sightseeing."

"Wednesday morning the bivvy building began. The men made for the site at 7:45 and were soon building in fine style on the excellent foundations laid by Don's party. Some of the bods cut a track to Hanging Basin Creek, while some more cut a track to the Avoca River from the site. By evening, Pythagoras had been well abused, the framework was all up, and covered with building paper. In addition, the side iron was nailed in place. The girls, after bringing us lunch went on up valley, climbing up to Gizah Col, and getting a grand view."