

Hi Robin and Robbie,

We had a very enjoyable time at the Ski Club Lodge - and a successful day's tramping on Saturday.

Rod, Kerry, Karl and Kane of course know the lodge but for all the others it was their first time there. They were really impressed by how comfortable our lodge is and how up-to-date in it's facilities. Also, of course, by how accessible it is.

The weather was kind to us Saturday, very warm to begin with, quite a cooling breeze. When we were at the Blue Lake area a quick hard rain shower made us don wet-weather gear but it lasted only a few minutes.

I did the crossing five years ago with Rod and two others and this time was staggered at the improvements to the track. The Devil's Staircase is now literally that - countless sets of wooden steps joined by good shingle paved track winding up. The rim climb out of the South Crater is unchanged but the long descent, much of it formerly a deep rut in the tussock is now also a "paved" path with a plastic hexagonal stabilizing mesh bedded in and shingle filled. Lots of sets of new steps down through the bush -line.

Formerly the walk was 17 1/2km - now track improvements have added 1 1/2 km, much of this at the Devils' Staircase area - according to Ailsa's relative, Elaine, at the DoC info centre. So perhaps I had an excuse for taking almost 1 1/2 hour s longer this time - perhaps also that I will be 80 in two month's time. (We didn't spot anyone else way near that age)

Rod and Kerry walked with a little 3-year old to the Taranaki Falls; another two, with dickey knees went as far as the Tama Lakes

Tongaririo Expeditions were great. Picked us up from the carpark at 7-45 am below Boomerang picked up one group of our party at 4pm from the Ketetahi carpark and delivered to Boomerang then went back for the remaining 6 of us - (5 - 4 family and one friend kept pace with me) leaving at about 5-25pm - should have been 5 pm - and drove the bus almost up to the Boomerang doorway. A nice couple.

Our (Ailsa helped me with shopping) provisioning worked out almost spot on. A bit of over-ordering with eggs, ice-cream etc but really not much overall. left over Ice-cream is in frig freezer - the first work party may enjoy it - and quite a few beers that no one claimed. I bought bread, salami, ham, etc for lunches . Calculated breakfast and dinner cost with cost of lunch ingredients spread over those, at \$8-12 per/meal/person (excluding the little one) which may be of interest to Janice Townsend. Without lunch costs this would well reduce to about \$7-50 /meal/person.

All were impressed by the standard of our meals - one chap belongs to a Ski Club with lodge on the Rock Garden - he agreed that at the lodges we don't do things by half measures!! - one wife having been rather shocked at my menu - what's wrong with mince and rice?

Had a fire on Sat night and through Sunday. Weather on Sunday was awful, driving light rain, heavy rain that night. Stong winds all day and night. Of the ones in my group (Howick Pres, Church Happy Trampers) only one left Sunday morning - he had to return to Taupo to wife and in-laws - all others were enjoying themselves there so much that they had no wish to go home early. And there was still food to eat that day etc!!

My 3 passengers were impressed by the DoC Info Centre, videos etc Sunday afternoon. (Discount entry price from Elaine) Another good meal that night - roast chicken, and roast veges, greens, apple pie, ice-cream, custard, whipped cream NZ trivial pursuits etc both nights - we had a ball. (Meatcuisine's boned lamb roasts Sat night were tender and juicy)

Thoroughly cleaned yesterday morning and left the place tidy before vacating.

The only sour note for me - I dropped off first passenger about 1 1/2 km from home, went to change up to second and the clutch cable, mounting or whatever, broke with a bang - thank heavens it didn't happen beforehand!!

So thank you Robbie and Robin - also to the Club for making it possible for all of us to have such a great weekend.

Kind regards, Kevin James.