

Solo

Backcountry adventuring in Aotearoa New Zealand

HAZEL PHILLIPS



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TALES OF AMBITION, RISK AND DEATH IN NEW ZEALAND'S BACKCOUNTRY

One afternoon in Auckland, journalist Hazel Phillips decided to close her laptop and head for the hills. She then spent the next three years living in mountain huts and tramping alone for days at a time, all the while holding down a full-time job.

As she ranged from Arthur's Pass and the Kaimanawa Forest Park to the Ruahine Range and Fiordland, she had her share of danger and loneliness, but she also grew in confidence and backcountry knowledge.

Her story of this solo life is an absorbing blend of adventure and humour, combined with her research into tales from the past of ambition and death in the mountains. She also casts a feminist eye over the challenges women climbers and explorers faced.

Full of pluck, courage and resourcefulness, this book is for all those who long to breathe the mountain air and hear the call of the kea.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

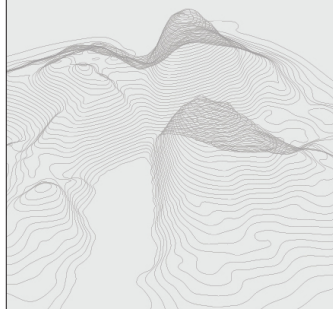
Hazel Phillips is a writer and communications professional who has worked for a variety of media, from the *National Business Review* (where she learned how to read a balance sheet) to *CLEO* magazine (where she learned how to use a hair straightener to iron a skirt). She has written two previous books: *Sell! Tall tales from the legends of New Zealand advertising*, a popular history of the advertising industry; and *Wild Westie*, a biography of Sir Bob Harvey. She is always working on a new book, even if it's just inside her own head. Hazel holds a BA(Hons) in French and an MA in media studies. In her spare time she enjoys multi-day tramping, skiing, ski touring, mountaineering, scuba diving, motorbiking, and sitting on the couch with a good book when it all gets too much.

SALES POINTS

- Compelling story telling, with a special emphasis on the experiences of women in the outdoors
- Inspiration to get out and enjoy this country's amazing wild places
- Wonderful descriptions of some of the best tramping in Aotearoa combined with tales of daring, courage and adventure from the past and today.

Introduction

Strategically homeless



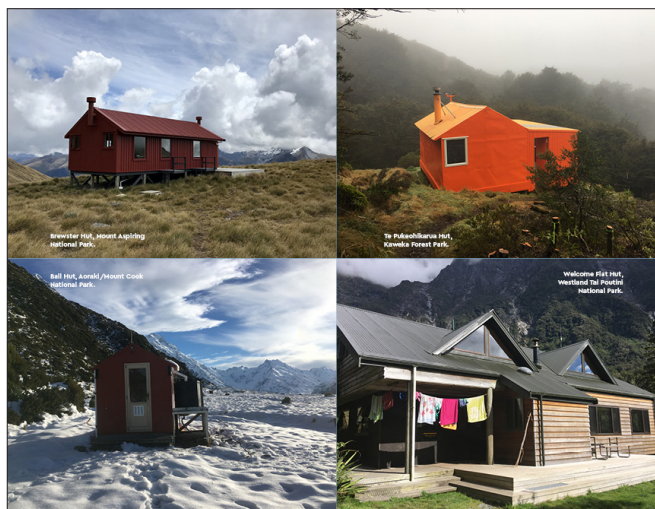
IN 2014, DISILLUSIONED WITH what Auckland had become, I left. I didn't know where I wanted to live, but I figured that packing up and going on the road would at least help me figure it out.

I was also disillusioned with the standard 40-hour-work-week approach of being chained to a desk, and I had switched jobs to a new gig where I was the only staff member in New Zealand. The rest of the company was based in Australia, so I was left on my own to get on with it. My work became entirely double-minded, and finally — everything was done with my 13-inch laptop, iPad and mobile phone — and eventually it just seemed silly to stay in Auckland, with its housing and traffic challenges. (In the age of Covid-19, it now seems unthinkable, perhaps ridiculous, that we once demanded that people be tied to a specific desk, in a specific office, for a specific period of time each week.)

And so I left. I packed up my whole life — except for a tramping pack, boots and ski gear — and cut a fast track south.

For the next three years I was strategically homeless. Home became wherever I chose to be at that moment. Sometimes it was an alpine club lodge, sometimes a Department of Conservation (DoC) hut, sometimes camping out in the bush or bedding down in a heavy bag if I'd stuffed up and had nowhere to sleep. Sometimes it was a nice hotel in Sydney, when I had to travel for work, which always presented a bizarre contrast of lifestyles. I once spent the night at Rangiwahia Hut in the Ruahine Range, tramped out there and drove to Wellington Airport, flew to Sydney and went to bed in a hotel that night.

Strategic homelessness allowed me to be in the hills every weekend and sometimes on weekdays, too. A typical excursion would start on Friday afternoon, when I'd haul on my pack, don my boots and walk into the wilderness until Monday morning. I'd usually have until around midday



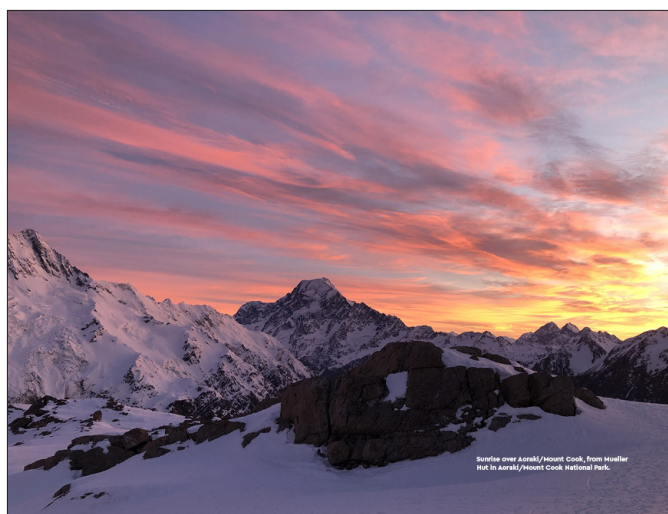
ABOVE | Skirting through the ice falls on the Taumanui Glacier, Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park. TREV STRAT
BELOW | Traversing saddle on the Travers-Sabine Track, Nelson Lakes National Park.



ABOVE | Lake Rotomahemata, also known as Blue Lake, in Nelson Lakes National Park, reputed to be the clearest lake in the world.
BELOW | The stunning clear waters of the Waimakariri River in Arthur's Pass National Park.



Bell Glacier, under the watchful eye of Aoraki/Mount Cook.



Sunrise over Aoraki/Mount Cook, from Mueller Hut in Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park.

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before I needed to be back online that's when my Aussie colleagues would begin to down their coffee and switch on their computers (and, possibly, wonder where I was).

To the casual social media observer, it looked like I was living a dream life — always skiing, tramping, mountaineering, with beautiful photos to show for it. What wasn't quite so obvious in the dishevelled social construct that is Facebook, was that it demanded more energy, enthusiasm, time management and work than ever. If I rode a chunk of Monday morning tramping out of the bush, it meant a late-night Monday. If I took off camping up a stream bed on Wednesday night, it meant a long Thursday workday. It was a constant juggling act — but it was worth it.

Over those years, I tramped my way up and down the country, from the Hump Ridge to Ruapehu and across the Kaimanawa and Kaweka ranges. I destroyed three pairs of boots, two packs and four sets of gaiter straps. Constant packs of dry food and salty snacks were consumed. People were met. Land was traversed. Books were read.

During this time I watched my good friend and fellow journalist Bob Hosking fade from the earth after losing his battle with cancer and never getting to do all the things he'd planned. His death and these years taught me that you only get one shot at this stuff. Make sure you give it heaps.



Taking in the stars and snow on a night-time traverse of the Tongariro Alpine Crossing. We started late in the evening under a full moon, which lights up the landscape as it reflects on the snow. It was cold. Very cold. MIKE HEYDON, JET PRODUCTIONS