



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

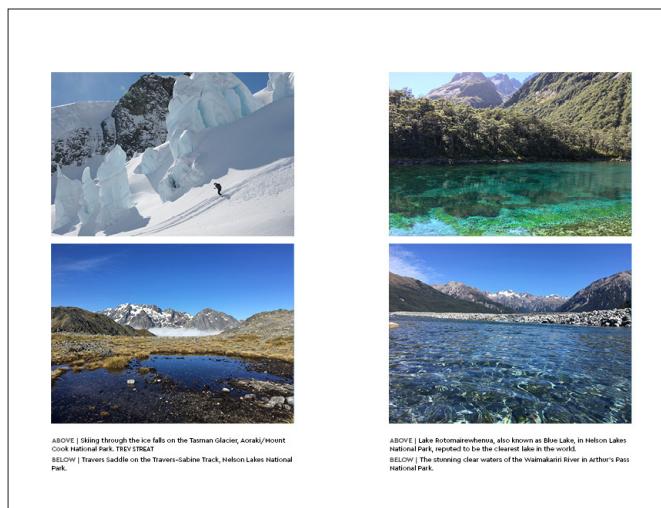
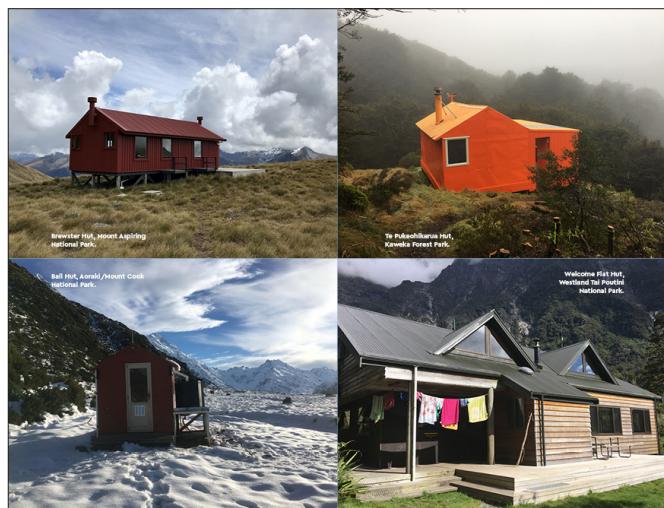
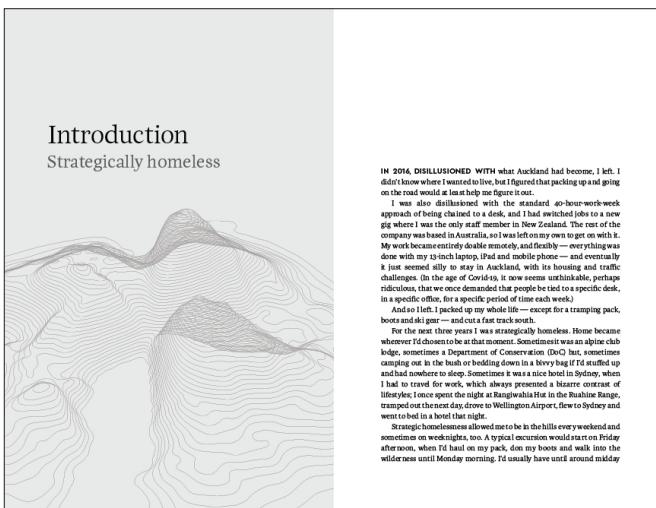
IN 2014, DURING THE LATE days of Auckland had become, I left. I didn't know where I would live, but I knew that packing up and going on the road would at least help me figure it out.

I was also disillusioned with the standard 40-hour-work-week approach of being tied to a desk, and the standard jobs to be a few gigs where you had only staff and equipment. Most of the company I was based in Australia, so I was left on my own to get on with it. My work became entirely double minded, and flexibly — everything was done with my smartphone, iPad and laptop, plus a car, and suddenly I had the ability to say, 'I'm not here, we're in the bush, 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 packed up my life — except for a tramping pack, boots and a gear bag — and cut a fast track south.

For the next three years I was a strategically homeless. Home became wherever I chose to be at that moment. There was an alpine club base, a hut, a Department of Conservation (DOC) hut, sometimes camped out in the bush, or bedding down in a bivvy 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 luxury and spending the night in Rangiwahia Hut in the Southern Range, tramped out the next day, 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 weeknights, so a typical excursion would start on Friday afternoon, when I'd haul on my pack, my boots and walk into the wilderness until Monday morning. I'd usually have until around midday



ABOVE | Skiing through the ice falls on the Tasman Glacier, Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park. **TREV STRAT**

ABOVE | Lake Rotomaiwhenua, also known as Blue Lake, in Nelson Lakes National Park, reported to be the clearest lake in the world.

BETWEEN | The Travers Saddle on the Travers-Sabine Track, Nelson Lakes National Park.

