



Hemi's Track

A 4WD Adventure of Discovery,
Mystery, Murder and Romance?

Written By Graham in
OVERSZ

Characters in this book are fictional and any resemblance to any person living or dead is coincidence only.

Situations are however based on fact and many are the embellished stories (lies) of actual events.

The Reader will have to decide what is fact and what is fiction.

Remember before attempting this portion of Hemi's Track by 4WD that you must obtain permission from the many property owners.

When the author has a few spare weeks an attempt will be made on driving the mid section of Hemi's Track. There might even be a 2nd book.

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Hemi

Many years ago an old Maori bloke I met up in the South Island High Country told me about this track his Father had taken him on when he was a young fella. They had gone from Hanging Rock, near Pleasant Point in South Canterbury to the mouth of a large river on the West Coast. It had taken them nearly 12 weeks and they had suffered terribly in the mountains. They had been caught by the weather and spent 10 days on a shingle beach on a river. One of the horses they had used to tow the dray had been injured in a fall and the food she provided was the only thing that saved Hemi and his Father.

Details of starting and finishing points were a bit confused as Hemi hadn't ventured to the West Coast for more than 60 years and he could only tell me that on the West Coast they had come out through a deserted town. He had no idea of its name and thought that maybe it didn't even have a name. It was completely set out with houses and Gas lights in the streets. The houses were all painted Olive Green and all the windows were shuttered. Hemi was old, well he looked old anyway, and nearing 75 I'd guess, but fit. Brown and wrinkled, his face had a permanent smile and frown all at the same time. Not a grey hair in his full head of curly black hair. You could see he was as comfortable in the hills as in the lounge in his house. His brown eyes were bright as he told his story. He told me that the town was a secret, that the Government didn't want people to know about it. Now this must have been, well I'm 50, and I would have been 20 when Hemi told me about this place. So 60 years at least since Hemi had been there, so at least 90 years ago. Maybe a bit longer than that even.

An Adventure coming on

Now I have only been 4 wheel driving for a couple of years and I remembered Hemi's story told so long ago. I got to thinking about it because I'm always trying to find somewhere new to go. I had never heard of a track that crossed the main divide apart from the State Highways and I've done a fair amount of Tramping in my days, so I knew my way around the South Island geography. I could think of many places along the main divide that trampers used, indeed the Maori used many of these before the white man came to New Zealand. Maybe it was the Haast before a road was put through, but Hemi had been definite about one thing, they had headed northwards.

For the hell of it I thought I would do a bit more research into this. Is it possible that there is an unknown track that's maybe suitable for 4WD from one coast to the other? And what's this secret town? Where is it?

Now I knew that Hemi would have long since passed away and that his own children would be getting on in years. I visited Pleasant Point, a nice little place a few kilometres inland from Timaru. Famous for its Steam Railway and Denheath Custard Squares. The Norwest wind was gusting and it was a warm day when I visited in October 2003. Inquiries took me to a dilapidated A frame house on the edge of the Kakahu Forest. Another few kilometres towards the hills. It sat low down on a bushy ridge with the forestry behind that. The track up to it was steep and full of pot holes. The house hadn't been painted for years and the wooden fence around it was falling down.

A lady wearing a blue polka dotted apron and an old pink dress opened the door to my knock. Her grey hair was

almost covered by a black beanie. It was hard to tell her age but at a guess it was somewhere between 60 and 90. A smoker for sure and were the empty Gordon's Gin Bottles stacked neatly beside the back door hers or her husbands?

She gazed at me through smudged specs and greeted me like a long lost friend.

"Giddy, You lost?" She wanted to know. A big smile with some wide gaps "Good day for it, warm too."

The Norwest was sweeping down the valley and it was a pleasant 20 or so degrees.

"My names Gordon and a good few years ago I met an old bloke up in the hills, his name was Hemi. Does this mean any thing to you?"

"You mean Hemi, my father in law? He's working just now."

Puzzled I asked, "Doing what?"

"In horticulture" She laughed 'Grows daisies. Nah, Hemi's been dead for 22 years. Killed by a tree falling on his tent down in the Catlins. Poor bugger he loved the bush and it killed him, If he was gunna go it was where he would want to go. In the bush. I'm Donna his Daughter in law. Don's missus".

"Is Don about, can I talk to him. He might know something about a trip Hemi and his father did 90 odd years ago."

"Dons not too good. Been crook for weeks and now he's got pneumonia. Come in."

"Hi Don, I'm Gordon. Bit crook eh!" I told him why I was there.

Don looked about 80, his breathing laboured, his nose blue from lack of circulation. A bit paler than I remembered Hemi, but the smile frown was like looking

at Hemi. Someone must knit beanies as Don had one pulled down over his ears just like the one Donna was wearing.

He was quite fuddled and talked as if his dad Hemi was there in his bed room.

Donna explained that Don was the last living descendent of Hemi and Myrtle and that in recent days Don and Hemi had had some 'curious conversations.'

I asked Don if he knew about this trip that his Father and Grandfather had undertaken some 90 years previously.

He didn't seem to understand my question or indeed what I was talking about. As he spoke he drifted off to sleep. Donna suggested I come back in the morning as Don was often less confused in the mornings.

Mike

I stayed the night in the Pleasant Point Pub and it was there that I met up with a friend Michael; I hadn't seen Michael for many many years. He was still as I remember him, tall and lean. We'd been on a few tramping trips together and he was very fit. I always had to catch up. He'd be sitting on his pack or on a log waiting for me as I came huffing and puffing up the hill. As soon as I got there he was ready to go. We had kind of drifted apart when he started climbing mountains. I preferred it below the bush line.

I told him about my quest and amazingly he said "I remember, I was there when that old bloke told you about it. Remember we were in that hut up in the Hopkins and the old bloke wandered in just after dark?" It was all coming back to me now. Hemi was revisiting his old hunting block and arrived at the hut with the back steaks from a Chamois. He had shot it on a shingle Scree and just a few yards from the track.

Hemi cooked it fresh on the poker over the glowing embers of the fire. We had already eaten but Hemi insisted that Mike and I share the 2nd steak. It was the first time I had tasted Chamois and it was delicious. Tender and very tasty it was many years before I was lucky enough to try it again.

In front of the fire we had shared stories of our experiences of the hills and it was late in the evening that Hemi had told us about his journey with his father all those years ago.

Mike's eyes narrowed more as he remembered, "I had the impression that this town was somewhere between Greymouth and Westport or somewhere inland from

there anyway.” He couldn’t say why he had got that impression but at least it was another starting point. We shouted each other jugs of Macs Gold until the Bar Manager said it was past his bed time. Mike and I made plans for the morning as he too had become interested in “Hemi’s Track” as we now called it.

Don

Neither of us should have been driving when we headed off in my Toyota Prado next morning. If Geoff Smith, the local cop had got me to blow the bag I would have been in allsorts of shit. There was no sign of Geoff as we headed up to Dons old place near the bush. Mike was fairly quiet and I was wondering if his interest last night was more to do with the Jugs of Macs Gold we had consumed.

As we pulled into the steep track heading up to Don's place I could see Donna waving to us and as we parked up she beckoned to us to hurry.

I introduced Mike as we headed quickly to Dons bed room. Amazingly Don was sitting up and looking quite bright.

"Morning Gordon, morning Mike" he said.

Now this really blew me away. He had remembered my name from the day before but I had no idea how he knew Mike. Mike looked at me and shrugged his shoulders.

"Have we met?" Mike asked.

"Of course, you must remember that night up the back of Ohau" Don replied "I shot the Chamois and we cooked it over the fire."

Donna went a bit pale "That's not his voice, he sounds like his Father." She sat down on the only chair in the room.

Mike looked like he needed a seat and I knew I did too. My hangover hammered away and I was wondering if this was some strange dream. I don't believe in this hokus pokus stuff. The spirits visiting or speaking through someone else is just an act. In my opinion it's all make believe.

But I was seeing this for myself. Don was very ill yesterday, Donna looks like she has seen a ghost and Mike and Don have never met before.

I sat down, still shaking a bit on the edge of the bed. Don looked at me and I shivered right down my spine.

“Well Gordon” he said “You were here yesterday and wanted to learn more about that track Dad and I used back in 1908.”

Incredibly I was able to confirm, “Yes that was why I had come.”

Mike had left the bed room and I could hear him outside, he was quite ill. This had really shaken him up.

Nervously I began, “You told us about the horse you ate and the terrible weather and how you almost died.” I wasn’t talking to Don now, I was talking to Hemi.” Can you remember more about where you went?”

He began, “We had a load of Flax from the Pa at Kaiapoia and my Father had some Greenstone to collect from down the coast. We weren’t meant to be doing this, it was not meant to be.” He went on “My Father had upset the Queen of our tribe and had been sent from the Pa in disgrace and wanted to prove himself to the tribe.” He faltered here, not knowing if he should tell us more. Eventually he said “you will need to swear to tell no one about what I am to tell you.”

I considered this carefully. I was no longer sure I wanted to know more. This was scary stuff. I hesitated, and he said “I’ll tell you of the track freely, but you must keep this other that I tell you secret.”

“Okay.” I agreed.

I can’t tell you all that was spoken about in the next 2 hours, but can say if this had been public in 1908, history would have been changed. Hemi had taken a huge secret

to his grave when he had died and “Hemi’s Track” was just a tiny part of it.

I pretty much knew about where to start and thought I knew where it finished, or at least thought that I could find it. The South Island’s not such a big place. Not anywhere near as big as Australia and it should be possible to sort out.

Donna and I went out to see how Mike was and found him snoring in the Prado.

Donna invited us to lunch and as we entered the kitchen we heard a thump come from the front of the house. It seemed the whole house had bounced on its foundations. We rushed down the hall to find Don on the floor beside his bed. I would find out no more about Hemi’s Track from Don. He had breathed his last breath and fallen to the floor from his bed.

Mike and I comforted Donna and made contact with her niece who lived at Burkes Pass.

Donna had a cuppa and calmed down a bit. “It’s for the best you know” she told us. “Don’s been unwell for weeks. He’s suffered so long. It was really tough on everyone. But I will miss him.”

Already Donna was getting on with her life and I felt we were now intruding.

We said our goodbyes and Mike and I headed back down to Pleasant Point in the Prado.

Mike was quiet as we pulled up outside the pub. Neither of us felt like drinking so I had a Ginger Beer and Mike a Coke.

“Well what do you think?” I asked Mike “I wouldn’t mind finding this track.”

“I don’t think we have enough info” I could see Mike was reluctant. He had had a huge scare, so had I, but

strangely I felt a bit more comfortable with it. Maybe it was because I had heard the whole story while Mike was sleeping off his hangover.

“I’m going to see what I can find out anyway” I told him
“I’ll let you know what I find.”

We hadn’t talked much about what we had been doing with our lives lately and I asked Mike how his family were.

“Kids are great, Jim works at Mataura works as a Slaughter man and in the off season has a job with a landscaper. Does a bit of fencing too. Jenny’s a home girl. Helps Bruce a bit on the farm but likes to be there for the kids”

“How’s the missus?” I asked innocently

“Don’t talk to me about that bitch. Walked out on me when Jenny got married. Cleaned me out. She’s living over on the Coast somewhere. Don’t want to ever see her again, nor do the kids”

That left a bit of a dent in the day. I hadn’t met her but she had been a keen tramper and had headed for the mountain tops with Mike. I remember she was quite a few years younger than him. The guys in the tramping club reckoned he would need to take a pram tramping to put her in.

Things were a bit morbid so I decided to head home to fire up the computer. Mike was heading home to Gore As I drove home I wondered if the best place to start was this town in the Bush on the West Coast. It must be easy enough to sort out. Just ask. There are no secrets in New Zealand. And after all it was 95 years ago. Official information Act and all that stuff, it shouldn’t be too hard to get the exact spot the track finishes, well near the end

anyway. Then I can work back to where Don said they had started.

Murray

Back home I made a few calls to mates that had done a huge amount of 4 Wheel Driving. Murray especially had been every where. Where ever we went he knew about tracks no one else seemed to know about.

“You heard of a town on the Coast that’s deserted, Murray?” I asked him.

“Yea it’s called Shanty Town” was his quick reply.

“No not Shanty Town, this one’s a secret” I wasn’t making sense.

“If it’s a secret then how would I know about it?” Murray was laughing at me.

I told him as much as I thought he should know. I didn’t want everyone knowing about it just yet. I wanted to get it sorted first.

“Yeah, I remember this guy in the pub one night over in Reefton.” Murray said, getting a bit serious now. “He was quite pissed and we were there on a trip with the Guys into Big River. I’d had a few Macs Gold too. This bloke was going on about a secret track into a secret town that no one was supposed to know about” Murray was silent for a moment. “You know how when you’re at the Pub on a 4WD trip, how every body knows places and when it comes down to it you can’t go there anyway? Well that’s how I treated this bloke. I can’t remember much more than that.”

Well now that’s two. Hemi and now this pissed bloke in the pub. Where there’s smoke there’s fire.

I had to wait until next morning before ringing DOC in Reefton so I got on the computer. I searched Google and came up with this bloke that’s been to every hut in the hills he can find. It seemed that if the hut was in the

South Island then he had been there. If anyone knew about this town I felt sure that he would.

I sent him an email, not sure if I would catch him home. Surprisingly I got an email straight back. It seemed that he was in the hills at a hut way down on the Southern Coast. He had his Satellite Phone and his lap top he was keeping in touch with the World.

His reply didn't do me a lot of good though, but, it wasn't a NO. It was "why do you want to know?"

I figured he knew about it but wasn't saying so just yet. I emailed back, not telling him everything as I wasn't sure how much I wanted to tell him. He knew something I was sure. Did that make 3? I didn't hear back from him for almost 2 months. His news was old by then.

By midnight I had poured over my maps and had a very rough idea of the route Hemi's Father had used.

If I was going to phone DOC in the morning, it wouldn't be Reefton. I reckoned I had narrowed it down to either Westport or Punakaiki.

I rang DOC in Westport first and not knowing who to talk to, spoke to the receptionist. I asked her about the town, silence. Then "I'll put you through to Barry"

Well Barry's voice message said he was away from the office for the next 21 days. Was I being fobbed off? I rang back and more silence. I'm onto something here I thought. So I asked to speak to the area manager. Barry was away from his office for the next 21 days.

I'm onto something here, I can just feel it. There is some kind of conspiracy going on.

I tried the DOC centre at Punakaiki and spoke to a very helpful lady, but it turned out she was just a volunteer and was happy to tell me all about the Pancake Rocks. Barry would be the best one to talk to in Westport.

Dead end! No not yet.

I rang my boss to say I was taking a few days leave.

Mary wasn't too happy with me but I was owed weeks in leave. This had become important to me.

Murray rang later that day. He had been thinking about this secret town and while he wasn't too sure, he had the impression that this bloke had talked about Charlestown. "I remember him telling me about Charlestown and this monkey that was in a movie being shot there. He reckoned they should shoot the monkey."

"I'm keen to find out more Gordon" he said "I've been most places and an adventure wouldn't go amiss."

"I'm heading for the Coast in the morning." Thinking maybe I could put the hunt off a few days until Murray could go.

"Pick me up on the way. I'm coming too" Murray was enthusiastic.

I arrived to pick Murray up in the Prado at 8.30 next morning. He had his Prado on the road and all packed and ready to go. Murray was all nervous excitement. He had been 4 wheel driving for 20 odd years. Land Rovers, Jeeps, he even had a Ford once. Blue eyes, always clean shaven, a bit of a ladies man. Tall and well built with that distinguished greying hair. He didn't really look like the type that loves the mud and the river valleys our hobby takes us to. Happy and a go lucky type he was a quiet thinker too.

"If we go off road it's better to have more than one truck" was his good advice. We headed towards Westport talking on the UHF radios about our plans. I wanted to call in at DOC in Westport before it closed for the day.

My instincts told me I was on the right track, that if it was there, I would find Hemi's secret town, that we would find "Hemi's Track"

We arrived at Springs Junction and stopped for a bite to eat and as we got into the truck Murray gave me a call on the Radio. He had a flat tyre, Bugger!

Karl

The big surprise though was another voice on the Radio.

“What are you blokes up to?”

“Who’s that” I asked.

“Karl. Is that you Gordon?”

“Yep. What are you doing here?” I asked. A bit suspicious that Murray might have jacked this up. Karl’s not a bad bloke. In on everything 4 wheel driving and handy to have around at a breakdown. He had helped me out of some awkward places in the past.

“Missus has dragged me over here. Got a sick Aunt in Westport” came his reply “What are you doing?”

“Doing a bit of exploring” I was cautious, I didn’t want to say too much over the Radio.

‘I’m staying at the Motor Camp in Westport, not sure for how long, could be a week or so” Karl said as he drove into Springs Junction in his Prado.

Well that’s 3 Toyota Land Cruiser Prados. On club trips we’re known as the 3 Prados. Couldn’t be 3 better trucks together or 2 better blokes to have around. Maybe I’ll fill Karl in when we get to Westport.

We got Murray’s Highlift Jack out and while Karl jacked it up Murray took the flat off. I had the spare ready to go on and in 5 minutes we were on our way. Team work.

We drove in convoy up through the Shanondoah and over O’Sullivan’s bridge across the Buller River. Through the Buller Gorge Karl was getting inquisitive about our exploring. He wasn’t too keen on the idea of sitting around a motor camp for days waiting for Kitty to finish her duties to her Aunt. “Her Aunts a bitch anyway” Karl reported “She hit me, Kits just given me a hiding!”

“Maybe you deserved that.” Murray replied. Things were lightening up amongst us and by the time we drove into

Westport I was ready to tell Karl all I knew about Hemi's Track, Well maybe not all but enough.

All the Motels were full. There was an international car rally due through soon and Motels were booked solid.

Karl was happy to have some mates staying at the camp with him.

I left them to get things sorted at the camp and headed off to the DOC office.

Maria

“I’m looking for some answers” I told the uniformed DOC officer behind the counter.

“How can I help Sir?” Very pleasant.

“There’s a town up in the hills near here” I told her “I would like to know more about it”

Silence.

“Who can I talk to about it?” I asked.

“You will need to talk to Barry” she hadn’t denied the existence of the town just wasn’t going to tell me anything.

“And Barry’s away for the next 3 weeks right?”

“I’m afraid so” she said quietly.

I had the idea that maybe she wasn’t that happy about fobbing me off. That this was not the way she liked to do things. That she was acting on instructions. Whose instructions? Why? What could be so secret for so long? I decided to come clean with her. She was really a very pleasant young lady, Maria on her name badge. “Look, let me tell you a story, at the end either tell me to go away or tell me what I want to know.”

I started to tell her the story of the old Maori bloke in the hills, about his trip over the main divide, and the story he told me about the secret town.

“No more, not here” Maria had fear in her eyes. “Here’s my number” she wrote on a scrap of paper. “Call me tonight.”

I was getting somewhere, it seemed Maria might become a help rather than a hindrance. But why? What was so secret out there in the bush that nobody was to know about? Maybe we were to find out tonight.

I went back to the Motor Camp to find Murray and Karl under the bonnet of Murray's Prado. Thinking something was amiss I called, "What's up?"

"Nothing" Karl replied "just admiring the way Toyota put these together"

"That's a great truck eh Gordon? Bet you're pleased with yours." observed Murray.

"Glad I got one of these, instead of a Pig" I laughed. We call all Nissans, Pigs. Especially the Patrols and Safaris. It's the way they wallow in the mud. I used to have a wee Terrano, someone nick named it piglet. There are some hard cases in the club and I was thinking that if this got a bit sticky over here then there were a few blokes who would be keen on an adventure.

"How'd you get on with DOC?" Murray was keen to know.

"What's going on?" Karl asked. "You two got some secrets?"

"Lets have a beer and I'll fill you in." We headed for our Cabin while Murray grabbed a 6 pack of Macs Gold from the 12 volt fridge in his truck.

"It all started years ago." as I ripped the top off a condensation covered bottle.

Karl listened to the whole story, well as much as I wanted to tell him. Karl was enthralled. He had been to many places but had never heard of this town or a track all the way over the Main Divide.

"I've got a call to make." realising that it was near 7 and that the 6 pack was long gone.

I rang the number Maria had given me and a bloke answered the phone. "Barry speaking." What the hells going on I thought. I asked for Maria and he said "Are you the bloke that came in this afternoon."

I thought 'here we go, another fobbing off', I'd been block walled. But my fears were soon allayed.

"We need to meet." Barry said. "But we can't be seen in public."

This was getting a bit odd, was my safety at risk? I was thinking about daggers and dark alleyways. But hey this is New Zealand. That sort of stuff doesn't happen in New Zealand. Does it?

His next words had me going a bit shaky. "There is an alleyway between the DOC centre and the Real Estate office next door. Come round the back, there's a door at the far corner, it'll be unlocked.

I wasn't too keen on this but with the three of us we would be okay. "What time?"

"Anytime, I'm there now."

I told Karl and Murray. We all got a bit concerned. Karl reckoned that there were some pretty deep Tomo's around Punakaiki that we would never be found in.

"Let's think about this" Murray suggested. "If one of us stays outside and something goes wrong then, we can get help."

I was glad now that we had bought Karl into this and wished that a few of the others had been here as well. Dazzer would have been handy and I knew he had a way of just taking time away from his job whenever he wanted. Chris the hard case Dutchman would be really enjoying himself too. I'll see how it goes tonight and maybe make a few calls later.

Barry

Karl went down town in his Prado and parked up 50 Metres or so down the road from the DOC office. Murray and I approached from the south end of town and could see a dim light on in the back of the office. We parked the Prado right outside and set the alarm. If we were dealt to and they tried to get rid of the truck then the alarm would go off.

Cautiously we walked down the alley, our senses working overtime. Were they waiting with a Ministry of Works crow bar?

There was no one else in the alley and no one in behind the DOC office. Light crept out under the door on the far corner of the building. I tried the door, it opened silently. "Come in quickly." Maria said urgently.

There were three people in the office, Maria and two blokes. Maria introduced them. "This is our Manager, Barry and this is our Bully Creek Conservation Area manager, Barry."

"I'm Gordon and this is Murray." We all shook hands and settled around the table as Maria made coffees.

The plot, well maybe just a bit of innocent confusion was becoming clearer. It seemed there were the two Barrie's and I thought I was being fobbed off, but why this clandestine meeting? Why all the secrecy?

Once we were all settled Maria started. "Gordon, can you tell us the entire story you started to tell me this afternoon. I've told the managers a little of it, or at least what you told me."

"Many years ago I met this old Maori bloke in the hills behind Lake Ohau." I told them all about my meeting with Don and the strange voice of Hemi. I told them as much as I wanted them to know.

In the silence that followed we all heard a noise out the back and someone coughed. Barry the manager sprung up from his seat like a coiled spring and wrenched the door open. Karl was standing there red faced. “I thought you guys had been kidnapped.” he blurted out. “What’s going on? You’ve been in here more than 3 hours.” I introduced Karl and felt a bit silly when I told them that Karl was our backup outside.

Bully Town

“Well guys it seems you’ve stumbled onto a fairly well kept secret. Yes the town does exist, but I don’t think that tracks there anymore. Bully Creek.” Barry began.

We listened intently as Barry told us the story.

Barry did and didn’t work for DOC; he was sort of on the payroll, but not really. He worked directly out of the Prime Ministers Office in Wellington and had flown down that evening by helicopter especially for this meeting.

In 1899 Richard John Seddon was New Zealand’s Prime Minister. He was a Coaster and an engineer in mining before that. He lived on the Coast and was fanatical about the region. At various times he was a Councillor and a Mayor of Kumara. He had been Minister for Public Works, Mines and Defence.

This story looked like it could become very interesting.

Barry stopped here. “What I’m about to tell you is secret, top secret in fact. I need your word that you’ll never tell a living soul about it.”

“I can’t promise that” I told him. After all by now I had enough information to find the secret town and the beginnings of the track. That was what I was really interested in.

Sorry but that’s the end of the free bit. There are a total of 142 pages. You have had 25.

If you’re enjoying the story it’s going to cost you \$10.00 to read the rest. Follow the link to pay by credit card or send a cheque for \$10.00 to Hemi’s Track, Graham Pullman, R D 22, Geraldine. Include your email address and I will send you the full story.

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Thanks and ENJOY the rest. I hope you get as many laughs as I did when I wrote it.

"Well at least keep the Government out of it and if you do find Bully Town and take others through you will know the true history, but make up some sort of story, an old mining town restored for tourists but never opened. Something like that anyway"

We agreed for the sake of 4WDing. If we could pick up Hemi's Track and force our way over the main divide we could turn it into a great 4WD trip.

Barry went on. "New Zealand Troops were fighting in Africa and War was threatened elsewhere. Seddon was a man of vision; he knew the vast wealth of New Zealand. It's gold and coal reserves and with much of the fighting in Africa to do with gold he felt New Zealand may be a target. He had Bully Town built secretly late in 1899. Engineers from the Army sealed off the area and by March 1900 the Town was completed."

"But why, how would this help the Government?" Karl asked.

"Well just like today there is a command centre under the beehive, so this was to become Seddon's Command Centre." Barry told us.

It all started to fall into place, but why keep it a secret still? Did I really care why anymore? Did anybody really care?

Murray did, "Whys it still a secret then?"

“The Government still maintains it; in fact it’s very much improved since Hemi saw it. It has its own nuclear power system” I gasped at that “and a state of the art communication system. It’s big enough to house all 120 MP’s.”

“How could the Government keep that quiet?” I wondered aloud.

“The PM is the only one in the know apart from us in this room and a couple of Generals in the army. That’s it.”

“The land it’s on must be recorded somewhere?” I asked. “Surely there are records?”

“It’s actually Government owned but looks privately owned. We have made out for years that its land disputed inside Paparoa National Park. The land owner won’t let anyone on the property for any reason.” Barry explained.

“That’s you people. Right? I asked.

Maria spoke for the first time in 5 hours. “Look it’s after midnight, how about we meet in the morning and I will take you three in.”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. The start of Hemi’s Track.

We arranged to meet at the Motor Camp at 9 the next morning.

Wolf River

Maria arrived in the DOC Toyota ute just before 9 the next morning. We had decided to travel in the three Prados. If we could we would explore further up the valley, further up Bully Creek, Hemi's Track.

Karl, Murray and I had sat up most of the night talking about how we would handle this and had decided that as few people as possible would be involved in this. That we would tell nobody the true location until we had everything worked out and been through the complete track ourselves.

For this reason I'm going to change a few names in this story, although anybody with a sound knowledge of the South Island shouldn't have too much difficulty working it out roughly anyway.

We set off South and turned away from the Coast at a fairly large river, Wolf River I'll call it. After a short while the going became quite rough. Large boulders had to be negotiated and there were many river crossings.

"The rivers a bit higher than normal." came Maria's voice over the radio. We had given Maria a hand held UHF radio. "The next crossing can be a bit difficult."

So far the Prado hadn't had any bother but the Hilux Ute was only on 31" tyres and hadn't been lifted.

Without fear Maria took on the next crossing. Only part way across I could see that this was big water for the Ute.

Then the front rose as the front diff rode up on a bolder.

The back swung around and the truck was facing upstream. Water was forming a decent wave at the front and breaking over the bonnet. Maria's gumboots looked like they would come in handy even sitting in the truck.

"Stay there" I called over the radio, needlessly. She wasn't going anywhere. This was sure proof that you

needed to travel in a group. If Maria had gone on her own likely she would have drowned trying to escape from the DOC truck.

We got our heads together and decided that best we get a rope on the back of the truck first. If she came off the rock she could be washed down river. Murray would keep a little tension on the rope ready to pull backwards quickly if needed.

But first to get the rope out there. Murray carefully drove his truck to the back of the Ute. The Prado being a heavy truck had no problem. Karl climbed out through the sunroof and a 10 Metre rope was attached to the tow hook on the Ute. Karl didn't even get wet.

Now it was my turn, I had to cross in front of Maria being very careful not to be swept into her. I also had to stop in a spot that broke the force of the water a bit so Karl could hook a rope onto the front of the Ute. Karl got a bit wet.

"I'll get Maria to massage behind my ears when we get her out of here. That waters bloody cold" Karl looked serious.

I had to ask. "Why?"

"That's where I put my nuts when I'm in cold water"

Karl's humour broke the tension and we relaxed a bit.

My Prado was soon on the dry on the other side of the river. No worries.

Murray was to pull and I had to keep tension on and once clear of the rock get her out smartly. I had seen trucks tipped over in a river when the shingle gets washed out from under the wheels. A disaster in here on our first trip could close it up to us for ever.

Another few minutes and all the plans came together. And Maria in the DOC Hilux was on the dry.

She opened the door and hundreds of litres of water came gushing out.

I had to cross again to get Karl over to his truck and as we arrived Maria was emptying her gumboots.

“It didn’t get up to the dash did it? I asked.

“No just above the top of my gumboots. No damage to the electrics but I’ll get the diffs checked for water when we get back” Maria obviously knew a thing or two about 4 Wheel Drives.

We decided that Maria would leave the DOC Hilux on the bank and hop in with Karl.

Maybe he would get the back of his ears massaged after all.

“Remember you’re a happily married man Karl.”

Murray’s voice came over the radio. “It’s normally my job to pick up hitch hikers remember.”

Stories of Murray’s hitch hikers were legendary. Every one remembers this female hitchy with her thumb out on the way back from a coast trip. Murray picked her up but it wasn’t a chick. It was a funny looking bloke heading for Christchurch to check himself into Sunny Side.

“I think you’d be safer to go searching on the internet for a woman.” Karl gave it back.

“My god these are great trucks” Maria’s voice came over the radio. “No problem crossing that in these.”

Maria was clearly impressed in the Prados.

We made our way up river slowly. It was fairly rough and we would have walked quicker. But hey why walk when you can drive, eh! The gorge got narrower and the cliffs higher.

Tomo

“There’s some major cave systems up there” Maria informed us “I remember abseiling down a Tomo a few years ago. I was on a 30 Metre rope. Luckily I had a big knot in the end because when I hit it I still couldn’t see the bottom. Took me 2 hours to prussic out of there. We went back the next week and couldn’t even find the opening”

This sent a chill down my spine as I remembered back to yesterday. God was it only yesterday.

We turned off the main river into a side stream. “Just up there a bit is the Dance Hall. It is a huge cliff all washed out under it. Been like it for millions of years. People camp in there. A stream runs along the back and when it’s raining you can have a cold shower with the water running off the front of the cliff.” Maria certainly knew the area well.

“Can you drive in there?” Murray wanted to know.

Leek Creek was amazing. The cliffs towered above us and huge trees had fallen and lodged crossways high above us. Gardens of ferns hung from the trees.

“We should be able to drive under all the hanging gardens” Maria was full of information.” When it rains in here the river can rise 10 Metres and the trees that get lodged lower down get washed away.”

We followed a mob of feral goats up the river, which was fairly easy going in fine shingle. The odd soft spot but no problems with the Lockrite Diff lockers front and back.

Murray’s truck was set up the same while Karl had Lockrite front and electric lockers in the back. We were all on 33” tyres. I had Kuhmo MT’s and was glad I wasn’t wearing the 14” wide Super Swamper Boggers that I normally have on for a coast trip. They just dig

holes in loose gravel. Karl had a near new set of BFG's and Murray had a worn set under him. His new Simex tyres were at home. Maybe we would wish later that we were better shod.

We weren't far up Leek Creek when Maria had us turn off the river and onto a track that wasn't easy to see. In fact I reckon that even if I had been walking I would have missed it.

There was a large rock sloping into the creek and it was up here we climbed. At the top you could make out a rough track winding through the trees.

"Not far now" Maria on the radio again. "I can see Bully Town up ahead."

I strained my eyes but couldn't see anything but trees. I was just 20 Metres from the first house when I spotted it. No longer were they painted a drab Olive Green. An artist had been in and everything was painted the same as the surrounding bush. Even the main road through the town of 70 houses and a giant hall was the same. The old light standards were gone. No need for light if you are trying to hide yourself away.

"It's all been painted in special paints that reflect their own colour from the bush."

The crimson of the Rata, the dappled green of the Beach Trees, the light green lines of the Flax, the flowing green of the Rimu, the giant Kahikatea trunks. Ferns of different shades of green reflected back from the paint work.

Maria again, with info galore as we stepped from the trucks. "On dull days or on bright days the paint changes and always looks the same. Amazing eh?"

All the houses were well and truly sealed. No windows to reflect sunlight anywhere. I had become conscious of a

slight hum and Maria could see me listening. “It’s the reactor, it can’t be shut down. Runs all the time.” We wandered about the town; another large building was the command centre with satellite dishes and aerials all over it. All disguised.

King Dick

I had Hemi's words in my head "We came though a deserted town" and "out a large river". Chances were that Hemi's Track was at the other end of town. Gorse had grown over everywhere up there but some was 12 foot high and there was a distinct track of gorse only 8 foot high.

We put the Bull bars against it and pushed. Some of it you could have built houses from but we were making progress.

"How come the track is even here?" I asked Maria.

"Richard Seddon wanted an escape route just in case"

It was starting to get a bit muddy up front. The day was getting on and yes we could come back. Maria needed to get home too as she had a 40th birthday Party to go to that night. Friday nights in Westport eh! Great place.

Getting out was no problem, we picked up Maria's DOC Hilux at the side of the river. Already it had that unique smell that comes with wet carpets.

We bounced our way back down Wolf River and turned north for Westport.

"I wouldn't mind a Macs Gold" Murray had been reading my mind.

"1st Pub on the lefts not too bad, hope they have it on tap" Karl was keen too.

The radio comes in real handy.

"Remember guys keep this one quiet. Remember Loose lips stuff trips" Was I being over cautious? Perhaps not. Kitty, Karl's Missus met us there; her Aunt wasn't doing too well. She wasn't expected to last past Monday or Tuesday.

"Anyway that's enough about my day, what have you blokes been up to?" Kitty wanted to know.

“Just had a bit of a bash up a river down South a bit with the boys” Karl told her. “Nothing special. Nice bush, big cliffs. Saw some wild goats.”

“I’m heading home tomorrow, I’ve got some research work to do, what are you doing Murray?” Karl was clearly disappointed and Murray was a bit surprised.

“Dunno, I took a week off work” Murray lamented.

“Help me with my research over the hill” I suggested.

It would be good to have someone do some leg work. I had a few ideas about where Hemi’s Track would go but some Aerial photos might help. I knew just the place to find them. Someone must have surveyed the track. It must have crossed private land even in those early days. There must have been people to cut it through. There had to be records.

“Spend a bit of time at the Westport Museum over the weekend, do a bit of searching. “Can you help Murray, Karl?” I was getting things organised. “You might want to take a look in Greymouth on the way back home.”

“What are you blokes up to?” Kitty demanded.

“Just sorting out a trip for the club honey.” Karl was quick off the mark.

“Is that all you guys talk about?” Kitty getting grumpy. “I’ve had a big day and I’m off to bed, coming Karl?”

Karl was smiling like he had just won the jackpot on the Pokie Machines behind us as he followed Kitty out the door.

“I’m heading for bed too Murray. I’ve had hardly any sleep for the last two nights and I want to get away bright and early.”

“I’ll have a couple more Macs first then I’ll follow you” Murray looked in the party mood.

I was asleep before my head hit the pillow. I had the best nights sleep ever. The old bladder woke me up just as those bloody sparrows were farting. I got up in a daze and stumbled off to the dunny block over the other side of the camp. “Why are they always so far away from the cabins?” At least it was going to be another brilliant day on the coast.

“Murray I’m off mate” I turned to Murray’s bunk.

Empty. Got lucky I expect.

His truck wasn’t outside either. I loaded my gear into the truck and thought I’d drive though town, look for somewhere for breakfast and see if I could spot Murray’s truck somewhere. Lucky bugger. I left a note to get him to phone me.

Westport was closed. Nothing was open, Saturday morning 6am and not even the Caltex was open. I drove around town. It’s bigger than you think but no sign of Murray’s truck. I had enough diesel to get me to Springfield but wanted something to eat. I headed south. I glanced left as I crossed the one way bridge over Wolf River and slammed on my brakes.

Hitching

Murray's truck was parked up about 300 Metres up stream from the road. All sorts of things were going on in my head as I did a 3 point turn and headed back over the bridge.

Cautiously, I pulled up a100 Metres short and got my Binoculars out of the glove box. No sign of life but the windows were all fogged up.

I drove a bit closer and tooted. Murray's head shot up, a big smile on his face. I pulled up behind the truck, got out, Maria was making herself decent.

"Found her on the side of the road with her thumb out"
Murray was a happy chap.

"I came back latish and could hear you snoring before I even turned me truck off." Excuses from Murray? "I decided to go over the other side of the camp and sleep in the back of the truck and then felt like a burger. I was heading into town when I spotted this bird with her thumb out. Couldn't believe it when it turned out to be Maria."

What a laugh eh! I chuckled my way down to Rapahoe, grabbed a coffee and a roll from the BP and by 8 was near the Jacksons Pub. Peeler Pete wouldn't have the bar open but surely he'd have the jug ready to boil for a coffee. I pulled up at the back of the newly renovated pub. Pete had the bacon in the pan and coffee in the cups before he turned to me.

"Gordon me old china, whatcha doing here this early?
Where you heading?"

I'd been afraid of questions and had an answer ready.

"Been doing a bit of exploring on the coast. Trying to get a track sorted for the boys." We had stopped there

several times for a feed on our way to the coast and Pete was keen for more business.

Pete was a Jafa, but a good enough actor that most thought he had been bought up way down the coast. His easy going nature made him the perfect publican.

A good bloke to have on your side and there if you needed him.

“Be sure to bring the boys in on the way over next time” he instructed “There’s a jug in it if you do.”

“Better get Macs on tap then.” I put my boots on and climbed into the truck.

“These are bloody great trucks Gordon. Got myself one a few weeks ago. Gunnado some mods soon, be able to come with you blokes.”

“If you need any advice give me a call.” I headed for the road. If I didn’t go now I’d be there for hours admiring his Prado.

An hour or so later I passed Paddy’s “Beware Moa Crossing” sign at the Bealey Pub.

2 hours later, I was home.

Map Work

I had a few calls to make; a bloke I knew up the road had Map Toaster with Hi Resolution photos. I needed them. I rang the software company on the off chance and got an answer. I explained that a cobbler had the CD's and I wanted them on my computer today. If I paid now by credit card would he give me the Access Key?

Very helpful and by 2 o'clock it was all on the screen in front of me.

I found it, Hemi's Track, well I couldn't see it but I knew where it was and if you looked real carefully you could see a tiny bit of the track heading into Bully Town. No way could I see Bully Town, it was well camouflaged. I could see the track in places as it rose onto a ridge but lost it again as it went into the next valley. I picked it up a bit further on when it joined onto a forestry track. It was taking me in the right direction. East generally but heading South too. Where had Hemi and his Father been caught by the river? Where had they spent 10 days?

Where had they had to eat the horse?

How could I find out more about the track? How had it been constructed? Who worked on it? There must be something somewhere.

Saturday and The Press archives would be closed. What about the Christchurch Public library. 1899 would they still have a copy? Maybe, just maybe.

The library was still open and an assistant was sorting books to go back on the shelves. She was glorious.

Gorgeous, 18, blonde, blue eyed, the hitch hiker I had always dreamed about. Young enough to be my daughter. My missus always reckoned that if I ever caught one I'd

be like a dog chasing a car. Wouldn't know what to do with it.

She looked bored, her name tag said she was Shelly.

"Hi Shelly, any chance at looking back at old copies of The Press?" I asked.

"All on computer now. We used to have it all on Micro film, still have, but its all on disk." Very helpful. "What date and I'll bring it up for you."

"I'm not sure but thought I would start in 1899. I'm doing some research on an old track and trying to find how it was put there." I explained. "May have even been a year or two later." This was looking fairly daunting.

"You know about search engines?" Like I know things about computers you old folk have never heard of. "They search for key words and you can narrow down dates."

I didn't mind the help. I made out that computers were a bit scary. It was nice to be near my dreams, and if Shelly could drive the computer faster than me all the better.

"I've used Google at home but always have trouble sorting the results." I'm not completely illegitimate!

"Com'on, I'll help." Shelly sat down at the key board.

"We can search more than one newspaper at a time."

"Well The Press for starters, was the Westport News going in 1899?"

Shelly tapped away. "1871 it started."

This girl was quick. "What about Greymouth's Paper? Dunno what it's called."

Shelly tapped away "1866 The Greymouth Star." Wow this girl was good.

"Okay pop them in too."

"What key words?" She was using all her fingers on the key board. I can only use one or two.

"Try Track or Roads." I suggested.

“9348 results. That will take some time going through all those. And that’s just 1899.”

“Let’s try and tighten the search.”

“Can we search just inside the results so far but first broaden it to include through to 1905?”

Click “Easy.”

“Right lets try Men and Gangs.” They had to have men and in those days they worked in Gangs.

“98 results.”

I began reading down the results ‘Roding Gangs Continue to Disappear.’ jumped out. It stood out like dogs balls. “What’s that about?” Pointing to the heading on the screen.

It was an article from The Press dated 1st November 1900.

‘The Constabulary at Methven are concerned about the disappearance of yet another roding gang. Senior Constable McGinty told The Press that a gang working on building the road into Mt Oakden Station inland from Lake Coleridge had simply vanished. Ministry of Manpower Overseers had complained that all Men, horses and machines including steam shovels had disappeared without trace. This was the third such gang to disappear without trace in the last three months. Something very suspicious is happening and we will investigate the matter fully, Senior Constable McGinty assured us.’

“What’s all that about?” Shelly was getting real interested.

“Can you do a related search in these results?”

Click

“Roding Gangs Back at Work.”

The Press dated 15th May 1901.

‘Despite extensive inquiry by the Constabulary nothing was discovered about the disappearance of Road Gangs in the South Island. Five gangs in all went missing, some for 10 months. Ministry of Manpower say all men are accounted for and just 3 horses are missing. All the machinery was returned and now working in various places through out the South Island. Further attempts to interview Manpower Management proved wasteful of our reporters efforts.’

Old Maps

I had a bloody good idea now how they had done it. Old maps. I needed old maps. This was one hell of a secret. How could they keep hundreds of men quiet about what they had been doing for months?

“Any old Maps I can look at?” I asked hopefully.

“Not our thing really, try the Museum.” Shelly was still trying to be helpful. God I wish I was 30 years younger. Then again I wouldn’t trade what I’ve got in a million years. Well maybe a million but not in 999,999 years anyway. Lara was pretty special to me and we had been married nearly 30 years.

The Museum would be closed soon for the day and tomorrow was Sunday. Unlikely anyone could help me dig out stuff from the Archives.

I had a party to go to tonight but wasn’t really in the mood. My mind was working overtime and the 4WD Club Guys and Girls would be there. I’d have trouble keeping my mouth shut too.

It wasn’t really a special occasion anyway, Paul’s 55th and a half birthday party. Paul was a hard case South African, been here for a few years, divorced from his missus he always had a party to go to. If he didn’t he’d have a birthday party of his own. He’s been known to drive 250km after a days 4 wheeling to go to a 50th, party until 3 in the morning, get a couple of hours stacking Z’s, then meet us again for another day of 4 Wheeling. Keen eh! If I was going to bring others into this, Paul would be one of them. Only one trouble with Paul, he drives a Pig. I didn’t go to the party I spent the night on the computer again. Tumonz has property boundaries and owners on its maps. They’re a bit hard to read and the graphics are shocking but you can get a 3 D image of the area you’re

looking at. It's awesome for planning and making contact with property owners.

I picked out the track over from Bully Town to near Reefton. While Hemi hadn't gone through any towns, that he could recall, it was probable that his Father had wanted to keep away from people, remember he was an outcast from his tribe.

I had figured that he had gone up a valley near the Reefton Saddle. Duck Hide Valley and into the Inangahua River before taking a left turn into Rocky River. Over the top into the Omokaroa River and then Theater Creek. Over the tops you can see from the aerial photos a distinct cut where a track was long ago. You didn't need to be Einstein to know it would be tough getting down into the valley but then if you thought about it some of the places they put roads into were like this. Skippers Canyon, Arthurs Pass, and hundreds of kilometres of roads all over the backbone of the South Island were examples of engineering by the early road gangs.

So down into the Mississippi River. There are a few forestry and mining roads in here. That would make things a tad simpler. Out of here and into the 6 Mile Creek. Before following the ridge down towards Leek Creek and Bully Town. 76 clicks from Reefton and some of the old tracks were now roads. Shouldn't be too hard.

She's awesome mate

About 9 that night I got a call from Murray. I could hear the smile in his voice. "She's awesome mate. What a day, and a night, I feel like I'm 20 again." I was pleased for him. Maria was very attractive, liked the outdoors, knew a bit about 4 wheelers and most important of all treated right, just might come up with a bit more info.

Permission to go where we want was on the cards too.

But had he been doing any research? "Good onya mate. Time you had a good woman to look after you. It's been a while since you picked up a decent Hitch Hiker. Last one was a bloke remember." I couldn't help myself.

"Been all over today but the best place was the DOC Office." he told me.

"You grubby bugger! I don't want to know the sordid details."

"No, but it's an idea for the future." he laughed "Front Office mmmm."

"Com'on tell me." I urged.

"Well Maria remembered a whole heap of old stuff that came back from Punakaiki Visitor Centre. Stuff they didn't need for their displays when they opened the park. Stuffs been in boxes in the storeroom for years."

"Com'on get your mind out of the storeroom Murray and tell me what you found." I had to prod him along. Maybe that was the wrong choice of words.

"Maps, old ones, survey ones, the ones we need. I couldn't believe it."

"Got some more news too Gordon." he sounded serious

"I moving over the hill."

"You reckoned you wouldn't hook up for a very long time after the last one, must be one hell of a hairy lasso mate."

“Yea well there’s that and I just like it over here. Had a job offer today and well I’ve been in my old job 19 years. They owe me nearly 6 months leave pay. I can just about buy a house over here. Be mortgage free if I sell in Christchurch.”

He’d done some research alright. Less than 24 hours and he had changed his life. I hoped he wouldn’t get hurt again.

“Karl says to tell you the old bitch died this afternoon and he’s stuck here now for a couple of weeks. Kitty’s got to sort things out. Get her buried, Karl reckons he’ll go to the funeral just to make sure they do it proper like, No way for her to come back like.

I wonder what they will want for the house?”

“Hey Murray slow down a bit mate” That’s priceless advice from me; I’m going at this track thing, like crazy. What’s Maria really like?”

“Well she’s been divorced for 5 years. Got a couple of kids down South, Says her dickhead husband’s in Gore and won’t let her near them. Been with DOC almost all her life. Started as a volunteer Track Warden at the Hooker Hut. And she’s in love, with me.” he added.

“Hey I was going to go to the Canterbury Museum to check out the Maps in the morning but I might come over and see if we can push the track through a bit up that ridge.” My mind was already behind the wheel pushing through the scrub.

Chris

This could be some hardout stuff and were 3 trucks going to be enough? If one of us got in serous shit were 2 trucks going to be enough for a recovery? I didn't want to involve any locals, even Karl might be a bit tied up. When Kitty wanted to wear trousers she put on hob nail boots as well. If Kitty said no then none of us could go. I rang Chris. "Whatcha doin?"

"Nuffing io don do anyfing on Sundies, jus havin a few Macs." His nasal Dutch accent was as hard to understand as it is for me to write so I'll give up and write it like he means it.

"Ready for an adventure' Chris?

"When? Where? How Much? Always worried about their money, Dutch. Spends a fortune on his truck, always dinging it, no worries. Then wants to know how much for an adventure.

"Today for a week or so, on the Coast and where staying at the Motor Camp in a cabin, a few Macs Gold and some food."

"I don't stay in Cabins." he protested "I'm a Motel man."

"All the Motels are booked solid. There's a big car rally coming through here soon."

"I'll call into The Big Red Shed and get a sleeping bag then."

He hadn't even asked what we were doing over there.

Okay that's at least 3 of us.

I rang Ed. Ed is his nick name. Short for Ed Hillary, a fearless leader of Men and Trucks. 'I Wonder Where That Track Goes?' is a favourite saying of his. We'd be bowling along a track, late in an afternoon, sometimes with a couple of hundred K's to get home and were off on another adventure. Sometimes for just a few minutes

to another dead end, sometimes to get us lost in a forest in the dark. He's always keen and I knew I could count on him.

"Giddy Ed."

"Who's that? Oh, its you Gordon. What's up? Just got 90 cent Ben here for elevenses." Ben was another 4WD club member. He had got the name because he was a tight ass. A good guy, lots of fun to be with but a real tight ass. We all had to put in a dollar each one day to buy a property owner a few Macs Gold and Ben counted out 90 cents from his pocket. "That's all I've got, don't want to break me \$5 note." We've given him shit ever since. He's also in love so I knew he wouldn't be interested or allowed to come over to the coast for a week.

"There's an adventure on." I told him as much as I had told the others.

"Bugger the Beer." Ed was excited. "I've got one small job in the workshop tomorrow, bugger all on all week, don't normally work Sundays but I'll do it this arvo. Be over later tonight."

Fives enough for now. There were one or two others who would drop everything and come on over if I needed them. Toby and Anita would be good to have here. Anita went everywhere with Toby. Drives a bit too. But I had a cook in mind when I was thinking of her. Camp Mother, just about as important as the Queen Mother. I put that bit in as I could feel the bruising on my leg already.

"Bring your Chainsaw and plenty of fuel." He would need it.

I fuelled up too on diesel and stacked a few dozen Macs Gold into my best chilly bin. Made a bit of room in the other chilly bin for a few bits of food, checked over the truck and I was waiting for Chris. I didn't have long to

wait, I was printing off a couple of maps I had thought about at the last moment, when there was a honk at the gate. Chris and his Pig were all loaded up.

“Got any room in ya chilly bin Gordon? Got a few Macs to keep cold.”

“I’m all full up Chris, you can cool them down over there. Ya dumb Dutchman. They have fridges on the coast eh!”

“Wadda we doin over there? Forgot to ask.” Chris was always keen, didn’t matter to him where or why. Just being there and part of it was what really mattered to him.

“Found a new track, hasn’t been used for maybe 80 or 90 years.” I didn’t want to say too much over the Radio, I’d fill him in, in more detail when we got settled into camp.

“Bloody good to be doin’ something,, haven’t been out since um, let me think, must be last weekend. I wis goin stir crazy.” Still keen.

We talked bullshit all the way over to Westport. The UHF radios are real good, especially the 12 volt ones. You can get reception for miles. One day I talked to Ed from the top of one hill to another and we were 70k’s away. 10k’s is good in most terrain but we didn’t need that distance. Chris kept the Pig going flat out and the only time I would leave him behind was on the hills. He’d catch me on the flat.

“Bloody good trucks those Prados.” Thought I would never see the day when a Pig owner would admit that.

“I’ll deny I ever said that. You ain’t got no witnesses.”

”Never mind I won’t tell too many.” I assured him.

Just out of Westport I got a text message. It was from my mate Mike. “r u in wport im on way c ya.

He was asking if I was in Westport and he was on his way there. Maybe he is interested in Hemi’s story after

all. He certainly hadn't been to keen back at the Point Pub. God was that only 4 or 5 days ago?

I texted back."styg mcmp"

Karl, Kit, Murray and Maria were at a picnic table when we pulled in to the camp. Karl handed each of us a dewy Macs Gold and as I ripped the top off asked, "Learn anything new?"

Kitty turned to Karl. "About what?"

"We've found a track up a river down south of here a bit. It's got a bit of history. Goes all the way over to Reefton. Could be possible to even go further than that."

I told her.

"You boys and your toys". Kitty didn't come very often on trips but when she did she always seemed to enjoy it. Karl even let her drive at times. I've seen her with both front wheels off the ground and more than once she's driven a bit of track that everyone else struggled on.

"Chris has come over to cover for Karl while he's helping you out with your Aunt's things. Ed's on his way too." I told them.

"Like hell." said Kitty with enthusiasm. "Karl's not having anything to do with it. Anyway Karl thought she was just a bitch anyway. I don't even think he should go to the Funeral." She looked at Karl, smiled and said, "Suit You?"

"Oh um yea." Karl stammered. "Okay, if you're sure dear."

"Just enjoy yourself with the guys."

So we were 5.

“Mike my mate from way backs coming up from Gore too, dunno why.” I told them.

“Mike from Gore? Mike who?” Maria was shaken and stirred.

“Mike Drummer. Do you know him?” Maria was looking deathly pale at this news.

“That Bastard, I’ll kill him.” she breathed.

Turns out that Maria and Mike had been married and there was still lots of hate.

“That’s a bit awkward.” Murray was a bit concerned too.” Maybe I should keep out of the way for a bit.”

“Nah Mike and I aren’t close anymore and you’re a good mate. From what Maria’s told you it seems Mike’s a bit of an arsehole. We’ll stick by you.” I told him.

Plus I needed Maria on our side.

“We’d better go. Better that we’re not here when he turns up me thinks.” Murray and Maria headed for his Prado.

Ed arrived in his older Toyota Land Cruiser. Lifted, locked and on 33” BFG Muds it was still a nice truck for its age.

Karl handed him a Macs Gold and as he sat down said “.Where’s Murray? I heard he was in lust.”

”Love mate” Kitty was the informer. Real Bad, Murray and Maria have just gone. You just missed them.” Kitty told him about Mike and Maria.

We organised a 9 o’clock start for the morning “I’ll ring Murray on his Cell Phone.” and headed our separate ways.

Some went for Burgers, some into the camp kitchen, me, I was waiting for Mike and not looking forward to it.

By the time I was ready for bed Mike hadn’t shown up.

10 past 9 and Murray hadn't shown up. I tried phoning, no reply, Murray's never late, never. If he leads a trip and leave time 9 then you leave at 9 not 10 past. I tried the phone again. "Jesus Gordon I just missed the call." He sounded upset. "Maria's gone."

"To work?" I asked. Maria was due back at work today. "No I woke at 2 and she wasn't there. Her clothes were here. She wasn't. I can't find her. I'm worried." Murray blubbered.

I could see Murray was in no fit state to come with us. It didn't occur to me to call the day off.

"Kitty's still in town, she might be able to help find her." I was full of good advice.

I still hadn't seen Mike, I realised as we headed south to Wolf River.

We stopped just off the road and I asked Karl, Chris and Ed to gather around. "Karl knows about this and I'll fill you guys in. It has to be a secret. Some forever and some until we have got the track sorted."

For the next hour I filled them in.

We bounced our way up the river. The level had dropped a bit but the forecast wasn't that good for later in the day. Norwest and rain. If it rained we would need to get out fast. This river rises fast and a 10 Metre deep torrent of brown water in Leek Creek didn't bear thinking about. We came to Maria's river crossing. The one where she had got hooked up on a rock.

Grim

I called the guys on the radio as I went across. “There’s a decent sized bolder just to my right. Take care.”

Chris was 3rd across and drove straight into it. Crunch and he kept on coming.

“Its not there anymore, I smashed it.” Chris was a legend at this. We had been on a river trip a year or so back and almost everyone had hung up on this rock. Chris just drove into it and it was gone. Smashed. If a Dutchman tries to sell you a Pig ‘never been off road, one careful owner,’ make sure you have a good look under it.

All across safely and left into Leek Creek, under the hanging gardens. Looked like there had been a truck in here earlier today. They were over the top of fresh goat tracks. Odd.

Up the steep rock face and onto the track in the bush. Through the trees and into the town. Ed and Chris had no idea what to expect and Karl had kept quiet. We didn’t want chatter on the radio anyway as you never knew who was listening. They were truly amazed. Chris didn’t see anything until he was completely surrounded by houses. “Wondered why it was such smooth goin.” he admitted. “What’s that up ahead? Wasn’t here the other day. I’ll check it out.” I told them on the radio. I climbed out of the truck and started walking towards what looked like a white super bag.

It wasn’t, I was sick, very sick. It was a body, a dead one. It was Maria. Her nude body had been dumped on the ground in front of the Command Centre. Her eyes stared at me and I was sick again.

Ed came up, Karl too, we just stood there. “Fucking hell, wonder who it is?” Ed said.

“Maria.” Karl wasn’t as shaken as I was.

“What’s up?” This from Chris standing on the step of his truck.

“Looks like there’s been a murder.” Karl was taking charge. “Maria’s obviously dead, nothing we can do for her. Don’t go any closer; the Police will need to take a look at this. Get evidence and stuff like that, photos too.” I grabbed my camera and took a few photographs. I want the Police to see we hadn’t touched anything. My photographs had come in handy in the past when we had been accused of something we hadn’t done. I had photographic evidence that it wasn’t us.

“We can’t just leave her like that.” Ed hadn’t even met her but he felt it was wrong. “She deserves a bit of dignity.”

Karl convinced him that leaving every thing as it was, was for the best.

We turned the trucks around and headed for the tar seal and Westport.

It was after 1 when we all pulled up outside the Police Station. There appeared to be a bit of activity inside. From the reception we could hear Murray. “I have no idea where she is. I woke at 2. Maria was gone. I’m searching for her. You stop me and drag me down here.” Murray sounded like he was in trouble.

I rang the bell at reception and a plain clothes cop came out. “Help ya?.”

He didn’t look like much of a cop. Tall and well built was the only cop thing about him. Unshaven with 3 or 4 days growth on his face. His clothes looked old like gardening clothes only clean. He was wearing his Westland Slippers. Gumboots we call them over the Hill. “I’m Detective Constable Mace.”

“Um, we just found a body up in the bush.” I stammered.

“Good god, have you?” The cop seemed a bit excited.
“Where about?”
“Up in Leek Creek off Wolf Creek.” I told him.
“What were you doing in there? That’s private. Nobody goes in there.”
“We had special permission from DOC. But that’s not important, Maria’s up there and she’s been murdered.”
“Maria from DOC?”
“Yeah and Murray’s new um, partner. I heard Murray’s voice from in there before.” Indicating the back room.
“How’s he involved with you blokes? D C Mace seemed suspicious.
“Yeah he’s part of our group, been doing some exploring up in Leek Creek.” Was I digging a hole for Murray? Had he done it? Didn’t bear thinking about. Murray was in love, surely he wouldn’t harm Maria.
“Better come back here fellas and make a statement. I’ll ring Barry down at DOC and let him know what’s happened. Sit down, make yourself a coffee.”
He came back in made himself a coffee and sat down.
“We shouldn’t be doing this.” Ed started. “Maria is up there no clothes on, dead, it just isn’t dignified. She should be covered and we’re sitting around having coffee.”
“We need to get some facts first, get your statements. Investigations like this have to be handled properly. I’ll have to call Nelson too, they’ll want to take over.” DC Mace clearly thought they could handle this from Westport.
This was clearly the biggest thing that had happened here for a long time.
We still hadn’t seen Murray and I asked what the story was.

“Murray was in at DOC a bit after 9 this morning looking for Maria. He was pretty distressed when she wasn’t there. Just a bit later another bloke was there shouting blue murder when Barry said he couldn’t tell him where she was. He got a bit wild on it and Barry rang us. Murray knocked us up when we were coming out of DOC. We were treating this as a missing person inquiry. Could be murder.”

He took all our statements and it was nearly 4 by the time he had finished. We still hadn’t seen or heard anything of Murray since we had arrived.

The Police wanted me to go into Leek Creek with them, to show the way. We only had a short time to wait and the Nelson D’s would be there. I was told.

“What are you blokes travelling in.” I asked.

“We’ve got the police Mazda 4x4 utes.” D C Mace replied.

“It’s a bit rough in there for them, there’s a few decent river crossings and some boldering to do.” I told him.

“We could get the SAR trucks through from Greymouth.”

“Nah, the guys will take you in.” I offered.

“They won’t mind?”

“Any excuse to go 4WDing.”

It was going to be late getting out. 5 before we get going, dark about 8. At least the rain that was promised had stayed away. There was just a gentle breeze off the sea. A little bit of high cloud.

“The four Nelson Cops arrived and with five from Westport and all their gear we were well loaded up in four trucks heading in.

Florient

I had D C Mace with me and on the way in I learnt that they called him Florient.

“That’s an unusual name, how come?” I asked.

“It’s actually Mark, but ever since we were allowed to use Pepper Spray, like Mace is used, God it gets bloody complicated, anyway Florient is an aerosol room deodorant and Mace is an aerosol. Those buggers back there have a warped sense of humour. Everyone has a crazy nick name. We call the boss from Nelson Opie. Cause he’s a slow dope.”

“We’ve got a tough crossing coming up.” the river seemed a bit higher than this morning, snow melt up the back I guessed.

We crossed without any drama. That boulder that Chris had smashed made it a whole lot easier.

“Bloody good truck these. Better than the Mazda we have back in the yard.” He was clearly impressed by the Prado.

We were soon heading up Leek Creek and I asked “You know what’s in here?”

“Only what you blokes told us in the statements.”

None of us had told him about Bully town.

“There’s a town in here.”

“Your joking.” He thought I was nuts. You could tell by his voice.

“No mate. It a secret town set up by the Government. That’s why you didn’t know about it.”

We climbed up the rock and onto the track, drove through the trees and into the town.

“Well fuck me.” Florient was flabbergasted.” I just don’t believe it. How could this place be here and we didn’t

know about it. Been up here in the choppers looking for dope. Jezz it's well camouflaged."

I could hardly believe it myself. Maria's body was gone.

"It was over there." I pointed to the Command Centre "It's gone."

"You blokes pissing us around or something?" D C Mace was pissed off.

"No way man. Maria was just over there. There must be some evidence."

Everyone was standing around in front of my truck.

Chris, Ed and Karl with their mouths open. Aggravation coming from the cops.

"Take a look, she was over there, must be some marks or something." I remembered my camera. "I even took photos. I'll show you."

I got the camera out clicked a few buttons. "See look."

The agro disappeared. One of the Nelson cops took charge and started setting up police tape. "No one is to go past here until forensics are finished."

"Florient you get your guys to set up a guard on the place, we won't get this finished overnight. I want a shelter over the scene. I want you blokes out of here." Pointing to us.

We offered to leave tents but they had all the gear they needed. One of the constables was to come out with us.

He had few calls to make. They needed reinforcements.

As we headed out it started raining and I was pleased to get over the difficult crossing before it got any higher.

I got to thinking. There weren't too many that knew about Bully Town and Murray was one of them. Of course Maria knew about it. The only others that knew about it were the two Barries and the Prime Minister. The

only other person that knew about the murder was Barry at DOC. Did he get rid of the body?

We dropped the cop off at the Police Station and was about to drive away.” Hold on.” He said. “Murray can go; we just need to know where he is.”

We filled a very distressed Murray in on what had been happening and headed back to the camp.

The camp was buzzing when we got back. Nothing like a murder to get everyone talking. Kitty was in the Kitchen with a group of other campers and a bourbon and coke in her hand, a big one.

“What’s going on Karl? You’re involved in this murder thing right? All you blokes are. Who was it?” Kitty had to know.

“Maria, she got murdered last night and dropped in the bush up Wolf Creek We found her. When we took the cops back up there she was gone.”.

Kitty turned to Murray”I’m so sorry. You two were great for each other. Do they know who did it?”

“They think it’s me.” Murray was close to tears “but I didn’t. Last time I saw her was just before I went to sleep. I woke up at 2 this morning and she was gone. I just can’t believe it. Maria dead, murdered.”

We had a sober meal, didn’t even feel like a Macs Gold and headed for the sack. No plans for tomorrow. Our week pretty well stuffed up. A whole day and we had got nowhere. Not even one Gorse bush knocked over on Hemi’s Track.

You Bastard

It was pissing down when I woke at 3 in the morning and sprinted over to the toilets. I was wet through when I got back to the Cabin

“What the?” Mike was sitting on my bed, Murray was still fast asleep.

“Shhhhhish, no one should know I’m here.”. Mike was soaked through. There was debris though his hair and his clothes covered in mud.

“I’m in the shit mate. I need your help.” I was starting to put 2 and 2 together and I was coming up with 4. “Police are looking for me; you have to get me out of here.”

Murray was stirring.

“Got anything to do with Maria?” I asked. Murray sat up fast.

“Who are you?” Then he realised. “You’re Mike.” He was thinking fast “You Bastard.” Murray was on his feet and had Mike pinned to the floor. ”You rotten Bastard.” Mike was whimpering. “Get him off me, help me Gordon.”

I was thinking the same as Murray. “You Bastard, You murdered Maria.” I accused him.

“It was an accident; I didn’t mean to hurt her. It just happened.” Mike confessed.

I grabbed my cell phone and rang the cops.

“Maria and Murray were going to start a new life together.” I wanted to kick his face in with its eyes too close together. “You Bastard.”

Flashing lights, sirens, cops everywhere in camp and soon the cabin was crowded. Kitty, Karl, Ed and Chris were trying to get in.

Karl called "What's goin on?"

"Got the Bastard that murdered Maria. It was Mike her ex husband." I shouted over the crowd in the room.

The cops had dragged Murray off him and had Mike cuffed in the corner.

"Tell me why." Murray was almost out on his feet with effort, relief and grief.

Mike shrugged, "I found where she lived as soon as I got to town and watched her arrive home. There was a bloke with her." He looked at Murray for the first time seeing him. "You." he said "You."

Murray looked like he was ready to throw a few more punches and one of the cops held him back. "You Bastard." was all Murray could say.

Mike continued "I waited outside and when the lights went off and all was quiet I crept into the kitchen. I did know what I wanted. Just a talk, I thought. I was sitting there and Maria walked in. She wasn't wearing anything. She started to scream, I grabbed her, held my hand over her mouth and dragged her outside. Must have been your truck out there. I tied her up and drove away in the Prado. When we were down south a bit I untied her, said I just wanted to talk. She calmed down a bit until she realised where we were. Wolf River, she was going on that I wasn't supposed to know, that no one was supposed to know. I couldn't understand what she was going on about. I got angry and made her tell me. We went up there to the town. I was getting angrier about the whole thing. We got out of the truck and she started screaming again. I thought someone living there would hear. I put my hand over her mouth again. I held her until she died. Oh God what have I done?" He collapsed on the floor.

The Police weren't too gentle with him as they dragged him out to the Police Car.

"We'll get your statements later. We'll formally charge him down at the station. Great work. Thanks for your help."

Why Mike thought I would help I had no idea. His thinking had obviously become deranged.

None of us could go back to sleep so we sat about the kitchen talking over the days events.

It occurred to me that we wouldn't be able to drive through Bully Town as that was a crime scene now.

What were we going to do until the police had finished? The Police would take statements later then we would be free to go. The big question though now was what had happened to Maria's body?

Karl asked that as soon as the cop opened up the door on the Police Station.

"Dunno. We can't get in touch with the blokes in there yet. The rivers up and the SAR blokes we sent in to get them are trapped a few hundred Metres up Wolf River." They should have known better than to try and tackle that river in flood.

"Their Landy got swept away. Lucky they got out. One had a cell phone and only just got reception. There's a chopper on the way to them now. The weather there is marginal but they won't get into the others. No where to land. The others can't get out and they didn't take any HF Radios with them."

High Frequency Radio has a huge advantage over UHF and CB or AM radio. H F bounces off the Ionosphere and you can talk radio to radio most anywhere in New Zealand. The new Codan model will allow you even to make a phone call to a landline anywhere on it. You can

communicate in private one set to another. They aren't cheap though. A new one will set you back between 5k and 7k but you can hire them for \$40 a week from Canterbury Mountain Radio. Good value if you were to ask me. Anyway the cops should have had their own in there.

"Chopper will drop some stuff in later to them if the rain clears a bit." It had started raining again, buckets full in every drop, but at least it wasn't cold.

"That's the only way they will get in and out of there if it doesn't stop raining soon and they'll have to winch up to the chopper. Leek Creek could be a raging torrent 10 Metres deep after heavy rain." I told him.

We gave our statements and by 10 we had nothing to do. The cops had our contact numbers and we could go as we pleased.

The Bucket Track

What to do? Stay around Westport in the rain. Have a few Macs Gold or go somewhere. Murray would know a few tracks up the way a bit and I knew there was plenty to do up round Seddonville. Lots of tracks round here to do and a funny coincidence. Richard John Seddon raises his head again. Just a nice pub now and a few houses. The Volunteer Fire Brigade is the centre of the community that once had 1500 men mining for Gold.

But did Murray feel up to it? We had all had a fairly hard time but this had hit Murray very hard.

If we wanted to find out it was easy, just ask. “Mate you up to some tracks up north a bit?”

“Shit yea.” Murray was as keen as. “Got any ideas where?”

“You’re the man, unless you’ve got some ideas Ed.” I answered.

“What about the bucket Track?” Ed suggested

I had done it on the end of a tow rope a long time ago. I was in the Piglet then. Just about ripped the poor thing in half. I used to own a Nissan Terrano and Nissans like the Safari and Patrol are known affectionately as pigs. The Terrano being a small Nissan was called piglet .

“Then lets see if we can get into Tin Town.” Murray suggested.

“Awesome, I’m ready.” Karl was ready to go.

“Got any rocks to smash in there?” No rivers for Chris, well nothing major anyway.

“Load your sleeping bags in. We might be away overnight.” I suggested.

We could stay at the Old slaughter House Backpackers in Hector for about \$20 each. Not such a good choice of names, but a good place to stay by all accounts.

“I’m going to Caltex to fuel up, only got a quarter left.”
Ed informed us.

We all thought it wise and did the same.

We were heading North before 11 and passing through Ngakawau to Hector just over the bridge. We had decided that we would be best to take a break from Westport and definitely stay at Hector.

We checked in. It was an awesome spot with view right up the coast or so they told us. It was raining and just getting our gear inside we all got soaked.

Down to the pub for lunch and by 12.30 we were at the bottom of the track heading up under the buckets at Ngakawau.

It was simple going at first. Ed in his rightful place up front. Chris as Tail End Charlie.

This is a tough truck track and I wouldn’t even attempt it without at least five trucks all with full recovery gear.

“This looks gnarly.” Ed on the radio.” Bugger, these ruts are big mothers.”

In the wet we would slide into the ruts in the clay track and that could cause a roll over. Care was needed, but if you drove the ruts the trucks would belly. Water was flowing down the track washing away more clay. Smaller sticks were coming down in this river in the mud.

“I’m bellied.” Ed reported. “Give us a hand to set the winch up will ya Karl.”

Ed winched up about 15 Metres. He had a good strong winch running off his PTO.

Karl had a go next and with his brand new BFG’s he almost made it. Ed hooked a rope on and tugged him the rest of the way.

“If that had been Kitty mate she would have driven it.” I was putting a bit of ribbing his way.

“This way I won’t break my truck.” was Karl’s retort. We towed up in turn. I wished I had my Boggers on but I wasn’t expecting this and they are shockers on the road. Noisy and not nice to drive on. Amazing off road in the mud though.

We progressed upwards until we got to a corner that had one side washed out. The bank on the driver’s side was about 8 foot high and the trucks would lean into it as we went around. Ed had a go and ground to a halt Hard against the bank.

Another winch job. Above the noise of the motor you could hear the panels grinding along the bank.

Amazingly the damage was minimal. Just the one small dent in the rear top corner. The water and the clay lubricated the way through.

Karl next. He chose to put a rope on before he got stuck. He needed it and like Ed had a wee dent in the same place.

We looked for the cause and couldn’t find it. We all towed through and we all ended with the same trademark on our trucks.

Not long after that we came out on tar seal. The road goes up to the Stockton Mine and this is where Tin Town is. It was still raining hard.

We were getting cold and Tin Town has some great views. It also has a normally small river to cross. With this rain it wasn’t worth going in there.

We headed back to the Backpackers. A few Macs Gold would go down well and if it stopped raining soon the river would be fine in the morning.

Karl was on his cell phone as we drove up to the Slaughter House talking to Kitty and as he came inside told us “Kitty just rung. The cops have arrested Barry

from DOC, looks like as soon as he heard from Florient he choppered in there and got rid of the body. He says he wanted to move the investigation away from Bully Town.”

“Wow.” I’ll bet he was acting under orders from the other Barry. “Bully Towns not going to be secret for much longer.”

“Kitty thinks we should be back here in the morning. The cops are having some problems up the river getting the Landy out and with our recovery gear could probably score a few points with the local authority.” Karl didn’t sound so sure, sounded like he wanted a day in Tin Town. We attacked the Macs Gold with some enthusiasm. We couldn’t send out for Pizza so we had a cook up in the kitchen.

Ed bought out a bottle of Tawny Port and tipped the whole bottle equally between 5 coffee cups. Very elegant, very nice.

I crawled into my sleeping bag about mid night. I could hear the others as I drifted off to sleep.

Recovery

Sunshine, a beautiful coast day. Everything washed clean, sparkling. The birds were singing and the Tui were making fools of themselves in the Kowhai Tree outside my room.

We had breakfast on the veranda. It was a real cook up. Bacon, eggs, hash browns, grilled tomatoes and lots of coffee.

“This Landy recovery might be a bit of a challenge guys.” Ed had been doing some thinking. “I wouldn’t mind giving Tin Town a miss and going back.”

“I’ve been in there before and it’s not going to go away.” This from Chris.

I was easy. I had been in there before but never all the way in. Like Chris said it wasn’t going away.

“I’d like to stay.” Murray clearly didn’t like the idea of returning to too many memories. “But I’ll go with the flow.”

“Yeah, I think Kitty would be disappointed if we didn’t come back now.” Karl was ready for Westport.

We loaded the trucks and by 9.30 were on our way. The Tasman Sea was smashing into the coast with huge breakers. Stirred up by the Norwest winds of the previous day.

Nearly high tide the spray was drifting over the road in places.

The waves were almost breaking right over Lovers Rock.

“Guys listen up a minute would you.” I spoke into the radio microphone. “We won’t be able to get into Bully Town, even if the river is low enough. The cops won’t have cleared it yet. What say we get this Landy out, if we can, then head over to Reefton and start the track from the other direction? I’ve got the names and numbers of

the property owners. Got them off Tumonz.” I had got most of them there but some properties were listed as companies. I had had to search the Internal Affairs web site and for \$1 had found the directors name and address. It was easy to get a phone number once I had a name. I’ll give the first couple a call now if you want to give it a go.”

The guys were all on for this “I’m here for adventure.” Chris on the Radio. “Bugger sitting around Westport.” Murray was next up. “My weeks running out fast I’m for Reefton. We can stay at the Old Nurses Home.”

“Ya minds always below the belt Murray.” I shot back at him, but I knew what he was talking about. The old Nurses Hostel at Reefton had been turned into a very classy Backpackers. Last time I had stayed there it was only \$15 a night. Sky TV and all. The All Blacks had thrashed the Lions that night.

“It’s a neat place to stay. We can set up camp there for as long as we need. There might even be the odd hitch hiker staying there.” Murray added.

“Lets grab some lunch and take it with us down to Wolf River. Hey Karl give Kitty a call she might want to come too.”

“Done that already. She’s got the cleaners coming in this morning and the Real Estate Agents this arvo.” Karl told us. “She’s a bit grumpy about me going to Reefton but like I told her I can be back here in a bit over an hour.” He would need to be in a racing car to do it in an hour but this seemed to have kept Kitty happy.

We grabbed Lunch, loaded up with gear, paid our bill at the camp and headed South.

There was plenty of activity at the Wolf River Bridge. Spectator cars everywhere. Heaps of Camper Vans, a few

4x4's and another SAR Landy. 3 or 4 cop cars, it looked like the circus had come to town.

There was a rope onto the Landy, on its side in the river. Looked like it was full of shingle. A write off for sure.

"Stop." Ed Shouted. "If that rope breaks or that hook comes off you'll kill someone."

The tension came off the rope. Ed took charge.

"Listen you blokes, we've done this before. That rope you were using is not much better than a clothes line. All those people back there are in danger if that rope broke it could take a head off."

At a demo I had seen a tow ball come off under strain and go right through the door panel of a car and just about take the opposite door off its hinges. If someone had been inside, the Tow Ball would embed itself inside the person. No question they would be dead or very seriously injured.

The cops took over crowd control and moved everyone back a good two rope lengths.

"Right Gordon you drive out and hook your rope on the side bar with a D Shackle." D Shackles made recoveries doubly dangerous. If something let go you had a 1kg missile on the end of the rope. "Karl you get ready to hook onto the back of Gordon to give a bit of extra pull." Ed had things happening.

"Chris you go up stream and set up your winch onto the back of it. You guys in the SAR Landy park up behind Chris's Pig to act as an anchor. I don't think it will wash down stream when we get it on its wheels but just make sure."

Chris and the Landy were soon in position. Karl tucked his nuts behind his ears and ran the winch cable out and hooked it on the rear tow hook on the Landy though a

snatch block. This would give Chris 20000lb of pull. The other SAR Landy was hooked up with one of Chris's recovery ropes.

"Right Gordon put some tension on" Ed was on his hand held radio giving instructions.

"Feels pretty heavy to me." I told him.

"Full of shingle. Karl you better hook up with Gordon. Let me know when you're ready."

"Okay let's go." I told Karl and Ed.

The wheels dug in but with eight wheels turning and a combined 6 ton on the ground there wasn't too much that wasn't anchored that we couldn't move. All our gear was rated at a minimum of 10000lb and was checked regularly.

The riverbed let go of the Landy and it very gently sat on its wheels. It wasn't going anywhere. The force of the river had no show of moving it. It was just too heavy.

We would have to bring it out up stream as there were some huge holes in the river downstream. This was going to be a challenge.

We unhooked from the Landys side bar and set up beside Chris.

"Right Gordon, you run your winch out and hook onto the other Tow Hook through a snatch block. That way we're not putting too much pressure on the one hook. Karl you come in behind Gordon and rope up. Murray set your truck up behind all of them and run two ropes out and anchor both pulls."

We set it all up. We basically had 40000lbs of tug.

"Right guys you ready?" Ed had it all under his control. There's nothing worse in a recovery not knowing who to listen to. We had learnt from experience that one person controlling a recovery worked best. If there was

something you need to give advice on, the recovery was stopped while you said your piece. It worked well.

A two ton Landy with 3 ton of shingle inside it is not easy to move, especially pulling it against the current. With that amount of dead weight the whole lot of us were being pulled towards the Landy in the river by our winches.

“Stop.” Chris called.

We all buttoned off.

“I think we need to be better anchored.” Chris said. I agreed.

Ed had some ideas. “We either have to get a few more trucks lined up or some long ropes back to the bridge piers.”

“Let’s just anchor Chris and Gordon.” Karl reckoned.

“That way we haven’t got another truck in there being stretched. It’s just another place for a rope to break anyway.”

“Okay.” Ed agreed. “We can set up another pull to if we need to.”

We didn’t need to. With Chris and me unmoveable there was only one option, The Landy had to come out. There was a huge cheer from the crowd. Lots of excited voices in all kinds of accents. German, Swiss, Dutch, American and the odd Aussie. Yes Aussies are odd.

The Landy looking the worse for wear was on the bank.

“Bloody god job guys.” one of the cops congratulated us.

“Didn’t realise you 4WD blokes were so well set up, so well trained.”

We took the praise in our stride. Murray offered the SAR blokes \$100 for the Landy, as is where is, but they said the insurance company would probably take it. “Hey give

us a bill for this and the Insurance Company can pay you.” He suggested.

“Nah. It was good being able to put our training into practice. Anytime you need a hand give us a call.” Ed had enjoyed this show of our skills and he was forgetting which side of the hill he was on.

It had taken just a little under 2 hours so we left them to get the shingle out and the Landy back to Greymouth. We had our well deserved lunch.

“Where are you blokes from?” A pretty blonde asked in an Aussie accent. She was 30 something, about 5ft 5 tall and carrying a back pack.

Murray was quick off the mark. “Over the Hill, Christchurch. Where are you going?”

“Dunno, Where ever I end up I guess. I’ve been up to Karamea, was going to walk the Heaphy Track but with the way the rain was yesterday thought I may as well give it a miss for now.” She pronounced give as geve and miss as mess. But she was cute and Murray was looking happier than I seen him in a day or so. God was it only 2 days since Maria had been murdered? Was it less than a week since Don had died over at Kakahu. Less than a week I had been on the quest for Hemi’s Track.

We had done so much. So much had happened to us. We had travelled so far. Learnt so many things. We had to push on.

Beth

“We’re off to Reefton.” Murray told her and made introductions. Her name was Beth, short for Bethany she told us.

“Want to come.” Murray had hooked another Hitch Hiker.

We climbed into our trucks and headed North then through the Gorge. Inangahua and then down to Reefton. 110 kms this way just 76 kms by Hemi’s Track.

The day was warm, there was a gentle breeze blowing with a clear blue sky. D C Mace and the cops from Nelson should have been able to get out from Bully Town by now.

We booked into the Backpackers and told our host we would in all likelihood be late back.

“Beth wants to come. Is that Okay by you Gordon?” Murray asked over the radio.

“I guess so, but look I need to talk to you in person.” I didn’t want Beth knowing anything about what we were doing. Just let her think that this was what we did.

We headed south, Ed up front, Karl at Tail End Charlie. 4 Toyotas and a Pig. Time was getting on so we thought if we could push our way over to the Inangahua River via Duck Hide Valley then that would be plenty for today. We could come out by road as there was now roads on the other side of the river we could use to get back to Reefton.

The property owner had no problems with us going through. “When my dad was allocated this land after the war there was a rough track over the top and down into the river. I pushed the D9 through when I was about 19 then the electricity blokes improved the track when they

put pylons through about 25 years ago. Mind you the gorse takes over quickly over here and its bloody steep on the other side. The track had been churned up sometime along time ago and hadn't been used for a long time. There was some decent articulation, especially on some of the tighter corners and without diff lockers we would have struggled. Chris and Ed both had ARB's. There were a couple of washouts across the track that proved interesting but no real bother for the well set up trucks. From time to time when Murray talked on the radio you could hear Beth squealing in the background. I wasn't sure if it was fear or excitement.

We reach what appeared to be the top and stopped to look out at the views. All the way back towards Reefton and forever up the Inangahua River.

"That's the most fun I've ever had on 4 wheels." Beth proclaimed." Well almost." She giggled like a school girl. Murray had a live one here. Woops wrong terminology.

"Yeah it's neat fun, especially somewhere new." Ed told her." No ones been in here for awhile."

"Murray's been telling me about his truck. Gordon's and Karl's are the same, right? She asked. "Bloody great trucks these Prados. I don't think I've seen them in Aussie. They seem to drive Pigs over there."

She was catching on fast.

We started down to the river. There were huge ruts where the rain water had washed down the track.

It goes to prove a point here. Some blokes run around in their Terrano's and Suzukis on 29" and 31" tyres, they get all shitty because they say that the trucks on bigger tyres wreck it for them. They say everyone should be on 31" tyres, no bigger. This proved it, there had been almost no one on this track and the ruts in places were

deeper than we could handle. It was still quite slippery and at one time following Ed I was in the rut sliding along on the steep track, all my wheels in the air. Luckily Ed was doing the same at about the same speed so fortunately I didn't catch up to him.

"I'm bellied." Called Ed. "Stuck and I'm going down hill."

Ed didn't need to tell me, I had seen him ride up on a log embedded in the top of the rut.

"I'm going to have to winch myself down hill. Never done that before." Ed had been doing this for longer than any of us; even Murray didn't have the number of years under his belt as Ed.

I had had the camera out a bit and got some good photographs of this.

This was going well, we were almost at the river and providing nothing went wrong we would be there soon. I should have touched wood. Although wood was the problem. A huge Rimu had crashed over the track. We explored on foot and there was no way around it. We could backup to the top maybe, but that was giving up. Ed was in the back of his truck getting his chainsaw out. I grabbed mine and we set too. The bar on our saws were only 16 inches long. The Rimu was at least a Metre and a half thick. This was going to take some time. The only way was to cut blocks out of it until we were through. I started at one side of the track and Ed on the side closest to the roots.

Karl, Murray, Chris and Beth dumped the blocks over the edge as they fell from the tree.

"This is worth a fortune Gordon." Chris told me when I stopped for fuel. "Just this bit we're cutting out for the

track would be 4 cubic Metres of timber. At \$1800 a cube that's over \$7000 worth."

It's no wonder that farmers were wanting to mill the Rimu on their land and were doing it illegally. The Government had bowed to pressure from the Greenies and made the cutting down of Rimu and other Native trees illegal. When Farmers were really struggling to make a living it was no wonder they milled the odd tree. One like this could be worth \$60K.

Widow Maker

I was well though my end of the log with my Husky saw, Ed still had a ways to go with his Homelite. The log appeared to be lifting at my cut and I could hear the odd creak and crack. I stopped and got Ed to stand back. I was about to explain what I thought could happen when it did.

A huge cracking, splintering sound and the butt of the tree sat up. I mean just stood up. Just as if it had been sawn of 7 Metres above ground level. It had happened so fast anyone within the log would have been catapulted into the air. We had averted a disaster by only a few seconds.

I was telling a forestry bloke about this some time later and he told me they were called Widow Makers.

Normally though it was from branches hung up in the tree being felled. He told me 6 people had been killed in New Zealand in 2003 alone by Widow Makers. A scary thought.

We cleared the rest of the debris from the track and moved on.

It was only 50 Metres down to a little flat beside the river. Barely big enough for the 5 trucks it would have made a nice camping spot for the night.

“Got a bit of a problem here.” Ed on the radio.” The rivers hard up against the bank. It doesn’t look too deep but it’s a 10 foot drop into the river.”

We had confronted similar situations before and we were soon busy with shovels and grubbers.

I had changed my mind about it being a nice place to camp. The Sandflys knew about this spot too. Swarms of them all looking for blood. The life cycle of these little blood suckers is interesting. They aren’t always

swarming about you. I remember reading about them while walking the Milford Track

The Sandfly spends a good part of its life in swift water, taking about 6-7 weeks in summer to develop from egg to adult. It's only the female that bites and draws blood. Apparently they need to get the protein from blood to continue the life cycle.

Adults lay eggs on the downstream surface of rocks or vegetation underneath the water surface in swift streams. Larvae anchor themselves to rocks. When first hatched larvae are about 0.5mm long and when mature 5 to 8mm long. They have hair like head fans which strain water for food particles. Larvae are mobile and are often seen in groups.

When ready to pupate the larva builds itself a small silken case attached to the rock. It then undergoes transformation to form an adult. Just before the adult emerges there is a build up of air between the pupa skin and the adult. The pupa skin splits and the adult rides in the bubble of air to the surface and is able to fly immediately. The Maori called it Namu and the mosquito, Naeroa

The Fable of the Sandfly is printed at the back of this book.

It took half an hour but we carved the top of the bank and Ed slid his truck over the top into the river. We all followed in turn and crossed directly to the other side and so to Reefton via Waitahu. The Bird life in here was amazing. The Podocarp Forest was alive with Kaka, Kereru, Kakariki and Tui.

Rocky River

It was 7.30 as we parked up outside the Backpackers. We were going to get cleaned up and head off to the pub for a meal.

It was good to have done a fair chunk of Hemi's Track Tomorrow we would start where we finished and head down the Inangahua River. The river flow wasn't too high and the forecast was good.

We could take Highway 69 but that seemed like cheating. Hopefully we could push our way up Rocky River. It looked like rough going. Only 13kms but we would take our camping gear just in case. Once we were into this we would have to camp out most nights. It didn't look like we would have this track sorted before Murray and I would have to go back to work. Karl had a few extra days as long as Kitty kept busy. Chris and Ed would need to review their time on Friday.

Tomorrow was Tuesday. We had a meal and a few Macs Gold to work on before bed. We had had a good day. Done a bit of community service and knocked off a bit of Hemi's track.

Murray and Beth were sharing expenses so I expected she would be with us again tomorrow.

We changed our mind and used Highway 69 towards Inangahua and dropped into the river opposite Rocky Creek. It was going to be a big day in there. Simple at first, we could use some forestry tracks and then some rough 4x4 tracks before bush bashing above a gorge in the river. This would be our toughest challenge yet.

"You happy up front." I asked Ed.

"My rightful spot." I think Ed liked it up there especially on shingle roads. We all had to eat dust.

“Could get a bit hazardous, on a bit. That bit above the Gorge will be interesting.” I said over the Radio.

“Take it as it comes.”

“Take care mate.” Thinking he could do with someone scouting ahead.

We knocked the first bit off in no time despite a few wash outs and a couple of old fences the owner had told us about. We carried wire cutters and the gear to fix fences with. We didn’t need to cut fences here they were already down and by the look of it for a long time. We had often come across a fence that had been cut by some dick head. We just as often fixed it, then let the owner know. I guess that’s one of the reasons that we get on so well with property owners. In country like this we help keep tracks open. Gorse and broom can grow very fast and unless it gets knocked back the track can become unusable in just a year or so.

“Shit that was close.” Ed on the radio. “Just about drove over a bank.”

We all got out to take a look. Ed had been pushing through the gorse, some of it 8 to 9 feet high. A few times he had to get out and with his chainsaw cut through some of the bigger stuff.

It wasn’t a river or an old creek bed. The ground just dropped about 10-12 feet. This was definitely the track. You could see that track continuing on the other side, just a few Metres away. It was just a canyon.

We had a look each way, left and right. There was no way around. The slot went on for ever. Nothing for it but to knock the top off. But before that could we get out the other side. Ed lowered himself down on a rope and a few minutes later reported back.

“We can do it, haul me up guys and let’s have a cuppa. We need to talk about this.” Ed clambered up the bank. “Hope we don’t find too many places like this.” Murray didn’t want a night in the hills. He had a nice comfy bed back in Reefton.

We sat around having a coffee and wondered what had caused the canyon.

It dawned on me. “The Inangahua Earthquake.” It was one of the biggest disasters in New Zealand. 3 People killed, hundreds injured and 300 people in and around here evacuated from their homes. I was living at home with my parents in Christchurch on the 23rd of May 1968. It was only about 5.30 in the morning and I was woken by what sounded like a freight train coming down the road. The house didn’t really shake, it rolled. We didn’t have any damage but houses were completely destroyed here. There have been bigger quakes in the world but this one was shallow, only 8 km deep and 7.1 on the Richter Scale. There were more than 800 after shocks, some as big as 5.

The Earthquake came only 6 weeks after the Wahine Disaster that claimed 51 lives.

It certainly explained the Canyon and probably the fences. As the earth moved fencing wire often just snapped.

“There could be more of this sort of thing Murray.” I reminded them of the Earthquake.

This was going to take some time to get through but we still had plenty of the day left. One thing with knocking the top off the bank the debris from the top fills in the bottom. It was going to be a bit different getting up the other side as gravity wasn’t our friend going up.

We set too with our gear. Beth was a tough lady and got on with it too. In just 30 minutes Ed slipped his truck over the edge, knocking a bit more off the high points. By the time Chris came over the top it was like Fulton Hogan had been in.

It took an hours hard labour to get out the other side. We ended up setting up a ground anchor and winching Ed up. Once he was up a quick tug for each of us had us on the old track again.

We decided to leave Chris's Pig there, not because it wasn't any good, but we needed someone up with Ed. We couldn't have him falling over a bank he couldn't see because of the scrub.

We traversed slowly above the gorge and dropped down into the river. You could see how high the river had been in the past. 50 to 60 feet up the banks. The water obviously built up here behind the gorge.

"I wonder where Hemi ate the horse." Murray wondered aloud over the radio.

"Ed Stop, Team Meeting." I couldn't believe it. Beth wasn't meant to know about the true reason for our trip. "Can you guys come up. Not you Beth I need to talk to the Guys."

"Sorry Gordon, It just slipped out. Didn't think. I feel real comfortable around Beth." Murray was full of apology.

"How much does she know?" I asked.

"Nothing mate, but she will have some questions now. What will I tell her?"

I suggested "We had a flame out in a turbocharger." I'd believe that if I was told that. Can you have a flameout in a Turbo? I dunno but it sounded good.

Slowly we headed up the creek. There wasn't a lot of water but in places there were some deep holes into the bedrock.

I was thinking too about Hemi and his dad. Murray had me thinking about the 10 days in a river. This looked a likely river but it could have been one of dozens that made up the route.

There were signs of mining in here, rocks in stacks, some of it appeared not too old. There were some derelict mines marked on the map and I had a feeling that this area had had a number of trees cut down. The forest had almost recovered so it was likely the timber had been used in mines and as firewood in the early part of the 1900's..

I had read somewhere too that MacRaes Mining had shown an interest in this area. It was now under DOC Control and could one day become part of the Paparoa National Park.

The headwaters are a natural spawning ground for Brown and Rainbow Trout and some of the eels we had seen were huge.

We only had a few hundred Metres to go before we had a hard left. The river narrows here and the boulders are shown on the map. That means just one thing they will be big.

Pin Ball Alley

It took only 20 minutes to get to the boulders. I've named it Pin Ball Alley.

"No way through here." Ed on the radio.

We all got out to take a look. Boulders 2-3 ton in size were scattered all over the mainly dry river bed.

"We have to find a way round." I said.

We had been so far but in reality covered only a small section of Hemi's Track.

"We have to find a way." I repeated.

"There's no way of heading up the hill and traversing it." Chris contributed.

"What about taking a walk back down the creek and see if we can cut the corner and drop in further up." was Murray's suggestion.

"We've got winches and slings." said Karl. "Look what we did with that Landy yesterday. We can set up snatch blocks and haul them out of the way. They only need to be dragged far enough to get Chris's Pig through."

Unfortunately the best winch was parked way back at the Canyon.

Karl took charge and set up trucks and anchors. Placed snatch blocks to get the best angle. 2 slings were put around the first boulder of about 2 ½ tons. The pull went on from my trucks winch. In no time it had been dragged about a Metre. One down 11 to go. While all this was going on Chris had used a spray can of orange hazard marker to mark a 2 ½ Metre wide alley. It would still take a huge amount of work and getting through Pin Ball Alley wouldn't be easy in the LWB trucks.

We were on a run; we had shifted 4 more boulders in an hour when Ed arrived back. He had scouted ahead on foot. He didn't have good news.

Bloody Hell

“It looks like the whole cliff has come down into the river up ahead. It’s blocking the whole river and there is a small lake behind it.”

All this and only to here. But hell didn’t the original road gang do this very much by hand? There must be a way. We walked up taking a rest and letting the winch cool down. There were hundreds of cubic Metres of rubble in the river. It wouldn’t all have to be moved. We could probably form a track over it but the lake was the biggest problem.

Dejected we wandered back to the trucks.

“I’m not giving up.” I told them. In a funny way Maria had died for this. We had invested almost 5 weeks combined effort into this.

We spent another hour moving boulders and had only the one really big one to move. It was going to be an effort but with 2 or even 3 winches we could do it.

Already I had been thinking ahead. It was only going to take 5 or 6 cubic Metres, but we could start the lake draining. Once it was flowing maybe it would wash out more. We could also bring a fire hose up next time and set up a siphon if we needed to.

It can be done. It will be done.

Time was getting on and it would take us 3 hours at least to get out. Most of our days would begin to be taken up by travel soon. Maybe we should camp in here for a couple of nights.

We got back to the Backpackers by 7, had a meal and a few Macs Gold. We talked a bit about the day and how we would handle tomorrow.

It wasn't long before we were swapping lies about previous trips and when Ed said, "Got a joke for you." we were ready.

"A teacher," Ed Started. "noticed that a little boy at the back of the class was squirming around, scratching his crotch and not paying attention. She went back to find out what was going on. He was quite embarrassed and whispered that he had just recently been circumcised and he was quite itchy.

The teacher told him to go down to the principal's office. He was to phone his mother and ask her what he should do about it. He did it and returned to his class.

Suddenly, there was a commotion at the back of the room. She went back to investigate only to find him sitting at his desk with his penis hanging out.

"I thought I told you to call your mom." she screamed.

"I did," he said, "And she told me that if I could stick it out till noon, she'd come and pick me up from school."

The way he told it had us almost rolling on the floor.

"Listen to this carefully." Beth had one.

THIS IS THE STORY OF RINDACELLA AND HER SIGLY USTERS

Rindacella worked very hard, flubbing scoors, emtying pots piss and shivelling shot. At the end of the day she was nucking fackered. Her two sisters were very bagly ustars. One was called Mary Hinge and the other was called Betty Swollocks They were really forrible hukers, and they had very fetty sweet and getty swanies. The sigly ulsters had tickets to go to the ball but the cotton runts would not let Rindacella go. Suddenly there was a big bucking fang and her gairy fodmother appeared whose name was Shairy Hithole. She was a light rucking fesbian, she turned a pumpkin and six white mice into a hucking cuge farriage and six dandy ronkeys with buge hollocks and dig bicks. The gairy fodmother told Rindacella she had to be back by nidnight otherwise there would be a cucking falamity. At the ball Rindacella was dancing with the pransome hince when suddenly the clock struck twelve. "MIST ALL CRUCKING FRIGHTY!" Said Rindacella and ran out tripping borse over allcocks and dropped her slass glipper. The next day the pransome hince knocked on Rindacellas door and the sigly usters let him in, suddenly Betty Swollocks lifted her leg and let off a fig bart. "Who fust jarted"? asked the pransome hince "Blame that fugly ucker over there" said Mary Hinge. When the sincking brown cloud had lifted he put the glipper on both sigly usters without success and their feet sticking funk. Betty Swollocks was fiscusted and gave the Pransome hince a nick in the knackers. This was not difficult as he had bucking fuge

halls, and a hig bard on. He tried the glipper on Rindacella and it fitted perfectly. Rindacella and the hince were married. The hince lived his life in licking fuxury and Rindacella lived hers with a follen swanny and they both lived happily every after.

Even before Beth was finished we had tears running down our cheeks. It was impossible to top that one and although I gave it a go my joke went flat.

“Comon you folks, keep it down a bit.” The manager was at the door. “People are complaining.” We thought we were the only ones there. It was time for sleep anyway.

Bully Town or Bust

Wednesday and I had made a decision. I was taking as much time from work as I needed. That was the first one. The second was we need a few more hands, a couple more trucks and at least 4 more people. And we would camp from tonight.

At breakfast I told the guys my thinking and everyone agreed.

“I’m not sure if I can carry on.” Murray told us “Beth wants to move on and I’m thinking about going too.”

“Mate those hairy lasso you find get you into bother every time.” Ed was giving advice. “Another week and she will have you in the North Island and then you’ll start talking funny, Aussie accent. We need you, you love what you’re doing and if you feel real strong about Beth you can catch up later.” Ed was very convincing.

Ed and Murray had been good mates for along time. “I know what I want to do will probably backfire mate, but it’s been good to feel like I’m 18 again. Yeah your right Ed, this is where I should be. I’m going to see this out. I’ve got 6 months leave due me. They won’t be happy but they have been at me to use it. I’ll stay.”

We paid our bill, packed the trucks and said goodbye to Beth. She had been fun to have about and we would all miss her wit.

Dirty Digger

I made a call, Sammy was a fairly new member but had done a wealth of 4WDing and he had a contracting business. He built drive ways and farm tracks. He had a Dirty Digger, in fact he had several. Could he bring one over? They are 4WD and will go most anywhere. With a variety of attachments available on his trailer it was likely we would only need the bucket.

“What the hell are you blokes up too over there?”

Sammy obviously knew a bit about what we were doing.

“The place is buzzing mate, everyone wants a part in it.”

How the hell did he know what we were doing? I asked him.

“I dunno where it came from but Paul rang and told me about it, bit pissed off that he wasn’t there too.” Loose lips!

“Anyway Sammy we need you.” I told him.

“I’m on the way, trucks all packed and ready to go, where will I find you.”

“Slow down a minute mate. I need one of your Dirty Diggers over here as well. Can you manage that?”

“Yeah, got a couple a spares at the moment. Things are a bit quiet and I can leave Justine to keep things ticking over.” Justine was his very capable daughter and if the truth be known ran the operation anyway.

“Take your time mate, we’re heading in there this morning and camping tonight. We’ll come back out tomorrow night. Meet you at the Nurses Home Backpackers in Reefton. Your trucks got a winch too?”

“Yeah PTO.”

“I’m going to get Paul over too, if he hasn’t got a party to go to.”

I rang Paul. “You looking for a rope bitch?” Was the first thing he said to me.

“Kitty rang the other night, told me what you were up too.” That girl just can’t keep her mouth shut.

“It was all meant to be hush hush. Just talked to Sammy, he knew and so do most of the others.”

“Yeah but shit mate, this is big news. A track from one side on the South Island to the other! Everyone wants a part in it.”

“Well this is your chance Paul. Get together with Sammy and we’ll see you in Reefton Tomorrow Night.”

“You’re on mate, see ya.” He hung up.

And that makes 7 but I suspected Ed would have to go back to work on Monday and Chris would need to get back soon too.

We headed out on 69, crossed the Inangahua and were soon bouncing our way into Rocky Creek. The track was getting better the more times we went over it. The Canyon posed no problems and the traverse above the gorge was like a well used track. We were at Pin Ball alley within 2 hours.

As we pulled up Chris informed us. “I fust jarted.” How nice for him.

“Don’t let it out mate, keep your windows up.” Karl didn’t want to share.

We hooked Chris and Ed’s winches up and soon had the last boulder out of the way.

Negotiating though them was tricky, but we were all soon through and ready to start on the rock pile.

“I think we should start on the down hill side and make a trench maybe 2 Metres deep and about a Metre wide.”

Karl’s engineering background was working for us “if

we work towards the lake then at the last minute start clearing when the water starts to flow.”

He explained that the bigger the head of water we kept in there the more pressure and the more rubble that water would wash away. Sounded good to me.

Gold

We started with enthusiasm. Tossing rocks aside, making good progress.

“Hey take a look at this,” Ed was holding up a rugby ball sized rock. “Is this gold in here?”

“Sure looks like it.” Murray took a closer look. “I’m not too sure but there is Gold in them there hills.”

Ed took the rock down and put it in his truck. When he came back he was looking a bit worried. “I just had a thought; if this dam breaks we could have the trucks washed away.”

We were off the rock pile as quick as look at ya. We parked up down from Pin Ball Alley. Well out of the river.

As we went on clearing the trench we came across quite a few rocks that looked like they had gold in them.

“I’m nuffing fackered.” I told them. “Time for lunch.”

“I fust jarted again.” Thanks Chris.

This was all Beth’s fault.

“I’ve got fetty sweet.” Ed informed us.

“Comon you bagly ustars. Lunch time.”

Murray had tears running down his cheeks “I’ve lost my follen swanny.”

We were laughing so hard it hurt.

We worked hard for the rest of the day and by 4 were almost ready to breach the wall. Water was tricking through and every rock removed created a bit more flow.

“Get out.” Karl yelled. “Get out now.”

We scrambled out just as a gush of water came through.

It was soon a raging torrent. You could here rocks bashing against each other, the noise was deafening.

Karl indicated that we should move back and when we were well clear said “The whole thing could go. There’s a huge amount of water in there.”

We watched and rather than diminishing the flow out the gap got bigger and bigger. The water was a brown torrent washing high into the trees as it went round a bend down stream a bit.

“Jezz hope the trucks are up high enough.” I said.

There was no way to get down to check, we would just have to wait until the flow dropped.

Mud

By 7 the lake was almost drained, just a small flow coming out but there was now another problem. The mud in the bottom was up to a Metre deep.

“You bloody beaut. Mud at last.” Murray loved mud. We all did.

We walked back to the trucks. The devastation on the way was amazing. More huge boulders blocked Pin Ball Alley. Some of the boulders we had moved were completely gone. Washed away downstream. The power of water. Thank God we had moved the trucks. They were sitting high and dry but our camping spot was gone. We moved off downstream a few hundred Metres and set up on a bushy terrace. The sandflys were out in force but we were happy with our days work.

The Macs Gold out of Karls 12 volt fridge was covered in dew. We would make short work of the cold ones. I was nuffing fackered.

An early start. It was good to save a couple of hours travelling. We had to clear Pin Ball Alley but this only took about 40 minutes. We could drive into the breach in the rockslide, in fact you could have driven a train through there.

The mud stank. We ran the winch out from Ed’s truck to a house sized boulder on the other side. Through a snatch block and back his truck. He winched out and was soon surrounded by mud. It was just about over his 33” wheels and his PTO winch was working hard.

“Guys I think you better have a winch on me. Just in case I have to be pulled back out.” Ed was worried about being stranded out in the middle somewhere. “Jezz it stinks.”

“Did you fust jart?” Chris wanted to know.

However Ed was making progress but his tracks were getting filled in behind him as the mud oozed back. It was going to be an effort getting everyone through.

It’s absolutely amazing the punishment you can give these trucks. Ed’s truck had mud over his bonnet. There was no way you could tell it was a Toyota. Mud was falling from every part of the truck as he drove out the other side.

I was next and it was surprisingly easy going. Ed had forced a track through, done all the hard work. By the time Chris came through he was able to drive it.

“These pigs just love mud.” he bragged.

We hadn’t gone much further when Chris started to over heat. Well his truck was getting up in temperature anyway.

We got the water bottles out and washed out the radiator as best we could. We would all need to keep a watch on our temperatures. A major cleanout with hoses back in Reefton would be needed.

James

While the cleanout was happening I headed up river for a look and couldn't believe my eyes. On a sandy beach there were foot prints, fresh ones, human ones in boots. None of us had been up here. Had someone been watching us? The others didn't seem very interested. They were still celebrating getting through the lake. We were having a cuppa when there was a huge explosion. A Kaboom that shook the earth. The cliff about 200 Metres upriver simply erupted. Huge rocks were thrown high into the air. The air was filling with choking dust and small stones were raining down on us. "For fucks sake, what was that?"

"Somebody just blew the cliff." I suggested. "Those footprints were probably a miner."

We made our way up the creek on foot. Rocks were still falling off the cliff. Our ears were still ringing from the blast.

"Keep back ya stupid bastards." A bloke was running towards us coming out of the bush at speed. "What the bloody hell are you doin here."

He looked up at us from in the creek bed. We looked down on him. Bald as a badger and as ugly as sin with a hideous goitre growing out the side of his neck. No teeth, just blackened stumps. I had no idea how old he was and the mud back in the lake was like perfume compared to him. The hair on his chest had actually grown through his bush shirt and was one matted cloth.

"You from DOC?" was his first question. "You smashed my dam." he accused.

"Nah we're not DOC and we thought it was a rock fall." I said.

He brightened a little and rolled his one good eye towards me. "Why you guys here?"

"We're forcing a track through here to the coast."

Murray said.

"The coast eh! Comes out the Wolf River, that one""

"Yeah." amazed that was all I could say.

"Haven't been through that way for 40 years meself. I use the forestry roads to get into the Omokoroa now, then come up Theatre Creek, over the top and inta hear.

Whyya doin this?"

He made no mention of Bully Town so I didn't mention it.

We declined his offer of a coffee back at camp but I told him a shortened version of Hemi's Track.

"I'm James." He stuck out a filthy hand. Looked at it and wiped it on his equally filthy shirt and offered it again.

"You blokes planning on bringing a few in here?"

"No not really. Maybe once a year 20 or so trucks." I told him.

"No way man. I bring me pack horses in but there's places that are real hard even for them." His one eye looked at me again. "Unless you got some bang."

I think he meant explosive but I wasn't going to show my ignorance. I was feeling pretty good. We were finally talking to someone who had been through Hemi's Track.

We walked up river. The rocks had stopped falling. I could see a viaduct coming out from a creek further up and a contraption set up on a low terrace above the creek.

"It's me Stamping Battery." James said simply.

This is one hell of a machine to have in here. Huge and all made of steel. The huge pistons, if that's what they are called are forced up and down on a huge cam shaft driven by a massive water wheel. The rock is fed into it

and crushed. The crushed rock is then washed over raffle boards and mercury on the boards attracts the gold to it. It was no wonder James had no teeth or hair and it was likely the goitre if it wasn't a tumour was from Mercury poisoning too.

The mud in the bottom of the dam was no doubt the result of the mining operation.

"DOC don't know about this place, Please don't tell," He reminded me a bit of Gollum in the Lord of the Rings.

"Nah were not interested, we just want to get our trucks through." I said.

"I'll help ya with some bang if ya keep me quiet. Bang Bang Bang." He was jumping in the air and every time he said Bang, throwing his arms in the air. He's a mad hatter I thought.

Workers in the felt hat industry dipped furs into vats of mercuric nitrate solution to make them pliable for shaping. In the process they absorbed the compound through their skin and inhaled the vapour. The resulting tremors, loss of teeth difficulty in walking and mental disability gave rise to the term, "mad hatters."

We headed back to the trucks leaving James loading rock into the Stamper. How had he got that over here? By track or by Helicopter? I would ask him later.

"Jezz he stinks." said Chris. "I'd rather be in a room filled with getty swanies than in an open paddock with him down wind."

We bought the trucks up and started clearing a way through the debris from the explosion.

We carried any rocks that looked like they had gold in them up to the stamper, the rest we stacked nearby. This was hard work and by 4 we were all nuffing fackered.

Paul & Sammy

Paul and Sammy were due in Reefton. We headed out. Under 2 hours this time, the track was getting easier. The bumps were levelling off. The Canyon was just a dip in the track. We might even get the Dirty Digger up as far as Pin Ball Alley on the trailer. This would save a couple of hours in the morning, if we could.

Sammy's Cruiser with his trailer and Paul's Pig were parked outside. I went to the community kitchen and opened the fridge. The Macs Gold was gone. Some Cotton Runt had stolen our Macs Gold.

I went in to report to the Guys and here they were all sitting there with dew covered Macs bottles. Kitty was there too.

"Came over for the night. I was getting lonely." She explained.

"How's it going with your Aunts stuff? I asked.

"Okay, got an offer on the house already. She left me the car. 1968 Morris Minor. It's outside, only done 35000 miles, goes like a dream." Kitty was pleased with the way it was going. But she had bad news for Karl. "We've gotta go home Karl. Got things to do."

"Jezz Kitty this is the best time" Karl looked like he was ready to plead. "It's going real well; we made real progress over the last few days."

"Come home, catch up then come back. I'll need to come back over late next week. We can make it a long weekend."

"Yeah makes sense." Karl agreed.

The cold Macs ran out about 10 and we crawled off to bed.

"I've got a follen swannie to check out." Karl grinned as he was going up the stairs hand in hand with Kitty.

Bang

We paid up again in the morning, promising to be back in 2 or 3 days. We headed off, Karl for Christchurch the rest of us up Highway 69.

Ed didn't lead in today. We needed a couple of heavy trucks in front of Sammy with the trailer. I went up front with Murray next with his Prado. We only needed the one tow, up out of the canyon. We parked the trailer up at Pin Ball Alley, Took the Dirty digger of the trailer and worked our way up through mud lake and onto James' Gold Mine.

Most of the way had been cleared but with the Dirty Digger it took only 30 minutes to get through.

James was very happy as the rubble was heaped up beside the Stamper with Sammy's Dirty Digger.

He gave us half a box of Nitro and a handful of detonators, some wire and a 6 volt battery. Sammy had used it before so James' instructions weren't needed.

We pushed on. The going got easier; the Dirty Digger was doing its job up front.

"I could bring the 18 ton digger in here if we needed." Sammy offered.

"We might need it yet but James has been coming through here for years and he had sledged the stamping battery in here in bits." He had taken it apart 5 times and moved it to where he was working. He had been poaching gold in here for over 50 years. His bush shirt looked like it had been on for 30 years. This was remote country.

It was simple going as we headed for the creek that would take us up onto the tops nearly a thousand Metres higher.

Omokaroa

“This is too easy.” Paul remarked.” I thought we were in for a tough time.”

The Dirty Digger and James had turned this into a highway. I had been wondering where James kept his horses when we came upon them on a terrace. On the side of one was painted COW on the other was HORSE. As we moved past I could see that the one with HORSE had COW painted on the other side. I wondered why. I would have to ask.

Even up the ridge it was good going and onto the tops was simple. The track wasn't that obvious but there were not many choices. We just kept taking the easiest option amongst the broken rock.

It was only 1 and we were heading down into the Omokaroa. The bush was closing in and the odd log was either moved by the Digger or sawn off.

We headed down stream a bit and then headed up the ridge on the true right of Theatre Creek.

Once again the going was easy but much steeper than before. The track was obvious and in places the Dirty Digger did a bit of work. We were nearing the top at 1300 metres by 4. We had made huge progress today. We left the digger parked up and returned to Sammys truck. We stopped on the way and found James in his filthy camp. “Saw your horses up a bit James.” I said. “What's with the COW/HORSE on them?”

“They stray a bit and sometimes head over into the next valley. Choppers go in shooting deer. Just wanna give me horses more chance.”

We would camp at where we parked up the trailer and bring Sammy's truck up to the digger in the morning. We would pick the trailer up in a few days if all went well.

We didn't have Karl's 12 volt fridge but we had kept the Macs Gold fairly cool in my number one chilly bin. We put the tents up, had a cook up on the BBQ, lit a fire and sat around under the stars telling lies and jokes. The Milky Way was at its best up here. Magnificent. Shooting Stars and Satellites passing over head kept us looking skyward. "I fust jarted." Paul had got in on Beth's joke. Murray looked a bit glum, he was missing Beth. I decided to tell a joke I had heard years ago.

Little Red Riding Hood was getting ready to go and deliver a basket of goodies to Grandmother when her mother stopped her, saying "Little Red, you had better be careful in the woods because the Big Bad Wolf is out today. If he catches you, he is going to lift up your little red dress, pull down your little red panties and fuck your little red socks off."

"Oh I'll be all right," Little Red answered as she pulled out a rather large shotgun from the basket she was carrying. Assured that her daughter would be safe, she allowed Little Red to leave the house and begin the journey to Grandmother's house.

Along the trail in the woods Little Red came across her friends the three little pigs (don't ask what they are doing in the woods, after all it is just a joke)

"Little Red, Little Red," they called to her, "you had better be careful because the Big Bad Wolf is in the woods today. He said that if he catches you, he is going

to lift up your little red dress, pull down your little red panties and fuck your little red socks off."

After showing them the shotgun and assuring her friends that she would be all right, Little Red continued her journey to Grandmother's.

Just then the Big Bad Wolf appeared and he said, "Little Red at last I found you. You know what's going to happen now, right? I am going to lift up your little red dress, pull down your little red panties and fuck your little red socks off."

"I don't think so..." Little Red replied as she levelled the shotgun at the wolf. She then lifted up her little red dress, and pulled down her little red panties and said, "You're going to eat me just like the book says...."

Ed had one "you reminded me of one"

One day the first grade teacher was reading the story of the Three Little Pigs to her class. She came to the part of the story where the first pig was trying to accumulate the building materials for his home.

She read, "...And so the pig went up to the man with the wheelbarrow full of straw and said, 'Pardon me sir, but may I have some of that straw to build my house?'"

The teacher paused then asked the class, "And what do you think that man said?"

One little boy raised his hand and said, "I think he said 'Holy Shit! "A talking pig!"

That started it; jokes went from one to another until after midnight. We crawled into our sleeping bags happy and tired.

“Bloody things gone down on me.” I could hear Paul in the next tent.

“You got a blow up missus in there?” from Chris’s tent.

“Wish. The airbeds gone down.” I could now hear the battery operated pump working.

“Don’t make it too hard.” I suggested.

The Mosquitos gave me hell during the night and by morning I hadn’t had enough sleep. A little hangover didn’t help. I was nuffing fackered.

Mississippi

Ed and Chris only had 3 more days before they headed back. It would be harder going without their PTO winches. They had proved themselves time and time again.

Paul's truck had one though but it needed a new winch cable. Sammy's winch was a PTO but seemed no where near as strong as Ed's.

We set out for the tops and as we went past James' camp he stopped us.

"When ya going to Reefton?" He wanted to know.

"Why?" I wanted to know. Jezz the stink.

"Gotta check this out." He touched the side of his neck.

"Been getting bigger, fast."

I dug in the back of the truck, tossed him my soap and deodorant. "Have a wash, you can't go to the doctor like that."

"Got any clothes I can wear? This is all I've got."

Anything would be better than that stink so I dug in my bag and gave him a Tshirt and a pair of shorts. His blackened stumps grinned at me. "Any undies? I'll pay you for them."

"Pick you up later today." How he was ever going to get that shirt off I couldn't imagine, no didn't want to imagine.

The going was easier. It's amazing the difference a few trucks going in and out make. We were soon parked beside the Dirty Digger.

Sammy headed off in front again and we followed like mother hen's chicks.

The tops were wide here, almost 2kms across, undulating here and there; steep little pitches in places but the track went on.

We began our decent into the Mississippi going down the true left.

“Got a problem here.” Sammy on his hand held. There’s been a huge slip and most of the tracks gone.”

This must be the spot James had told us of. We all walked up and surveyed the situation.

Sammy took charge. “Hope James gave us enough Bang. We need to blow this bank beside us and make it wide enough for the trucks. Don’t want to cause the track to slip away either.”

He was thinking out loud. “If we start up there a bit and don’t use too much bang we can cut in slowly. 10 or 12 times doing that and we should be through.”

“Right you guys, grab a couple of 30 Metre ropes. I’ll make up a harness. We can run a rope up to that outcrop go through a snatch block and hook onto me in the harness.”

We could then haul him up using the Digger and when he had planted the bang, lower him down.

We set to work. Ed and Chris set up the snatch block. I helped with the Harness. Sammy got the bang out. “We won’t go near the detonators until the nitro is in place.

We then get the detonators, put them in, then we get the wire and run that out and only once we are all clear do we get the battery out.” The safety rules were in place.

“Then as soon as it blows we put the battery away. This stuffs safe on its own it’s when we add other stuff that it gets to kill you.”

We lifted Sammy up. He filled a small depression in the rocks, moved to another place, did the same, and again.

We lowered him down. “While I’m doing this I want some clay mixed with just a bit of water. Put it in a bag.”

Up he went again this time with the detonators. Down again and up with the wire. Down again and up with the bag of clay. He packed the clay in on top of everything. "Makes the charge go downwards instead of just upwards." he explained as he was lowered to the ground for the last time. "Everyone way back. 200 Metres at least." He ran the wires back to the trucks.

Kaaboom.

We went forward slowly. As the dust settled we could see that there was a huge chunk missing. "Right."

Sammy said. "I'm the only one goes in there from now on. Loose stuff could still fall from up higher."

He set about laying the next layer of charges.

Kaaboom

We were making good progress and I thought just one or two more times would do it. We needed five but there was a cutting wide enough to get the trucks through.

"Can't go through today with the trucks guys, too dangerous."

"Can we go through on foot then?" I asked.

"Yeah, suppose so, One at a time, fast, don't want any of that crap falling on any of us." Was Sammy's cautious advice.

We ran through. Ed dodged a small rock that came bouncing down the slope. The track was easy going. A bit of re-growth in places, patches of gorse in others but the gorse was getting thicker and higher the lower down we got. We were getting well down the creek when Chris stopped.

"What's that noise?" he said.

"Some one fuss jarted? Murray wanted to know.

"Listen I can hear a truck motor."

We all listened carefully and sure enough there was a motor fading in and out of hearing.

“Must be a logging truck.” There’s forestry roads further on.

“I can see dust.” said Chris. And sure enough we all could.

We walked on and apart from a small rock fall there was nothing that the Dirty digger wouldn’t be able to handle.

“Looks like our camp for tomorrow night.” I pointed to a clearing. I had just seen the outline of a wall and roof through the trees.

We wandered down and to our surprise came upon a very nice hut. It was a private one but there was an invitation to use it if we replenished the firewood and kept it tidy.

There was a well worn track heading down hill.

I swung the Billy and poured black billy tea into the mugs. We would replace the tea in a couple of day’s time.

Back to Reefton

It was a bit of a grind up the hill but we were at our trucks by 3, hungry, we had lunch and backed up. We left Sammy's truck up there and took the Dirty Digger out. We would put that on the trailer and take it around. Come up the hill from the forestry road, sorting the track as we went. Then bring Sammy's truck back down.

We could do with a spare person over here with out a truck.

Ed and Chris were going home. I would ring 3 others tonight, one would have to be a passenger.

We stopped at James' camp. He came out "Got any deodorant? I don't want to pong for the Doc"

I laughed and told him he was just fine.

"Gunna pay ya for this." He told me.

"Nah, don't worry about it." I said.

"Ya don't understand. I got lots of gold, Every day I've bin makin a bar. Sometimes a little one sometimes a big one. I kin trust you, Don't tell them Dutch blokes though, don't trust em. He meant Chris and Paul.

"I'll keep it quiet." I assured him.

He slipped his hand into his shorts pocket and pulled out a slab of gold and handed it to me. It was half the size of a packet of butter but nearly wrenched my arm out of its socket.

"Bloody hell James, how much is there?" I asked.

"Bout 8 pounds, average day."

No wonder Macraes Mining wanted in here.

"Jezz Sammy that stuffs heavy." I had never touched gold in a bar before.

"90% pure too, got a bit of copper and silver in it too." he told me.

“What are you going to do with it? Who buys that amount in Reefton?”

“Pub buys it from me. Don’t want those DOC officers finding out about it. Got an arrangement. We weigh it and work out how much its worth, take off 10% for purity. He gives me 50% of its value in cash 30% in cheque and 20% in bar tab. I’ve still got all the cheques back at camp.” He seemed quite proud of this.

The publican was doing darn well out of this. He knew James wouldn’t be banking the cheques and there was no way anyone could drink there way through 20% of this. I worked it out. If the bar weight was 10 pounds that was 160 ounces. At \$US425 an ounce that came to \$US68000.00. That’s \$NZ97000 less 10% for purity \$NZ87000.

\$44000 in cash \$26000 in cheque and about \$20000 in a bar tab.

“Even shouting the whole place you can’t spend \$20000 on booze.” I told him my workings.

“Got more than that. Bar tabs up to a hundred thou now.” You boys have been real nice to me. Helpin and all that with the digger. You like Macs Gold. Gunna order a pallet for each of ya. Send it to ya homes.”

I protested but he would have nothing of it.

But James was happy enough with his lot.

“Got any family?” I asked.

“Don’t think so, had a sister once. She’s dead no kids.”

“You’ve got all that gold up there in the hills and no one to pass in onto.”

“Yeah, funny eh! The bloody stuffs probably going to kill me.” He touched the growth on his face.

We were pulling up through the canyon when he said
“This happened in the big quake in 68. You guys make
this track through here?”

“Yeah. Bit of an effort was all.”

Bloody great trucks these Prados, wish I could drive, I’d
have one meself.”

We crossed the Inangahua to the highway.

20 Pallets of Macs Gold

“I wanna go to the Pub first, do me business then see the Doctor.” he said

We pulled into the pub and I went in with him. The others followed and ordered Jugs of Macs Gold while James and I headed off to find the publican.

Well the short of it is that James came out with \$70000 cash. No worthless cheque and a bar tab for \$20000. The publican had an order for 20 pallets of Macs Gold.

Everyone working on Hemi's Track would get a pallet and James insisted if we want more just order it.

“Gunna show ya me stash when we get back to camp Gordon. It's all yours if this thing kills me.” He touched his neck again.

We went to the Medical Centre. I waited outside. I'd been there maybe 10 minutes when the ambulance pulled up outside.

I went in, told the nurse why I was there. She said Mr McNab was being taken to Christchurch for urgent tests. I asked to speak to him. He was being wheel chaired out to the ambulance when he saw me. “Doesn't look good Gordon, takin me to the smoke for tests. Come here Gordon I have to tell ya.”

He told me where his gold was. “Tell the others if ya trust em. It's yours if I don't get back. Do something good with it.”

It wasn't really right. The gold had sort of been stolen; anyway James wasn't dead just yet. I'd cross that bridge when I came to it.

We were a bit sombre at the Backpackers. I had told the guys about James and the pallets of Macs Gold being delivered and how the publican had been making big money out of James.

“I need to get a few more over here. When are you guys going?” Talking to Ed and Chris.

“We’re going in the morning. I’m hoping to get over next Friday with Karl, What about you Chris?”

“Not sure, works piled up a bit this week. If I work through the weekend I might get here in 10 days or so.” he told me.

“Don’t think its going to take that long. If we have some big rock falls it might slow us down a bit. But I reckon we have only got another 15kms of track to do. There’s 5 kms of forestry road near the hut so that only leaves 10 kms.

Boof

I rang Boof over the hill. “Been waiting for the call Gordon, can stay till Wednesday, Meet ya at Reefton right?” He was well informed.

“Got room for a passenger? I need someone as an extra driver.”

“What about Toby and Anita. She drives a bit. Two in one. I’ll call them if you like. I know they are waiting for the call-up. Toby’s got heaps of leave due.”

I explained that we didn’t have too far to go to finish this section.

Once we had completed the track we would then drive it with everyone. Maybe in a couple of week’s time.

In the lounge the guys were brightening up a bit. A meal and the odd Macs had cheered them up.

“I think we should have a rest day tomorrow. There’s only Murray, Sammy and Me left. Boof, Toby and Anita are coming tomorrow. That’ll give us five trucks and a spare driver. We camp in at the hut tomorrow night. Maybe two nights. See how it goes.”

We had a quiet morning about town. Fueling up, cleaning the trucks, clearing the radiators. General maintenance on the trucks.

We were enjoying really nice food at Alfrescos Outdoor Eatery and Pizzeria when a car pulled up outside.

The Medical Centre Nurse came in. She looked at me, “You Gordon?” She asked

I knew what was coming “yes.”

“Mr McNab died this morning. That growth on his head was a huge tumour. He only had a week or so left with it. They tried to remove it, he died. I’m sorry.”

I hadn't known the smelly old bugger very long but I was rocked by this. Murray and Sammy were too.

"Thanks." I said. "I'll look after the funeral."

The others looked at me like I was as crazy as James.

"He told me before he went where the rest of the Gold was. There's plenty there to take care of everything."

I rang the local Funeral Director, gave him instructions and told them where to send the bill. I arranged a notice in the paper; I didn't expect that there would be many mourners. Sad really how a life can end like that. The only friends were people he had met in the last few days. Boof and Toby arrived in town. Toby in his VX Cruiser and Boof in his SWB Prado.

Boof didn't do a lot out with the club but he did do a lot of Mud Plugging. Toby went on most trips.

We headed out on Highway 69 and kept going.

"That's one of the start points we have been using." I said over the Radio "Over the river and up Rocky Creek."

"Looks bloody rough up in there." Boof had slowed down to take a look. "Looks like private land."

"It is, but we've got permission." I replied. "Hey don't say too much over the radio, never know who's listening. I'll fill you in at the hut."

"I fust jarted." Sammy announced.

"You what?" Anita said.

"I fust jarted." Sammy said.

"You what? Did you say you fust jarted. Oh I see." Anita had worked it out fast.

Murray told the new comers about Rindicella and Beth and how we were all dyslexic now.

"You'll learn as you go." I told them. "I've got fatty sweet."

“You’ve got sweaty feet, I get it.” Toby was on the radio.
“I’ve got a dig bick and I’m the Pransome Hince. I’ve heard it before. Good eh!”

We drove though the Buller Gorge and instead of turning right to Westport turned South on State Highway 6.

“Shit, got a cop with a flashing light behind me.” Boff was tail end Charlie. “I’m pulling over. Wait up will ya.”
We went ahead slowly and pulled in off the road.

“He wants to talk to you Gordon and you too Murray.”
Boff sounded relieved. “He’s coming up.”

It was DC Mace in a plain car.

“Thought it might be you guys.” he said. “We need to catch up soon The perp goes to court next week.” He could see the puzzled look on my face. “Perpetrator, the guy that done it. Mike.”

“You need us there?”

“Would help if a couple of you were. Reckon he’ll plead guilty anyway.”

“What about Barry?”

“Funny thing happened there.” he said. “Got a call from Opie in Nelson, He says he got a call from up top and we aren’t allowed to pursue it. Something happening in high places. Anyway I just do as I’m told.”.

“Were heading into the Mississippi for a few days. When we get out Murray and I will give you a call.”

“You blokes, don’t you have work to go to?”

I laughed. “This is getting near the end. Call it holidays.”
We turned at Charleston and headed into the Mississippi. The roads were good and we were soon parked up out side the hut.

The Macs Gold was cold. The cookup was great. The company was the best. We sat around on a glorious night telling lies under the stars.

I told the story of Hemi's track once again.

I told them about James, the pallet of Macs Gold each and the Gold hidden at James' camp.

I had a few ideas of what to do with it. One of them wouldn't be to hand it to the Government. All my ideas had to do with improving the image of 4WD driving in the public eye. Things to do with clubs and training, stuff like that.

Skeletons

We unhooked the trailer, unloaded the Dirty Digger and set out up the hill. We had a bit of gorse to knock down first. The digger did it easy. Then a small rock fall to tackle next.

Sammy went in, took a bucket full and dumped it over the side. He had taken 10 buckets full when he stopped. "I'm not getting anywhere." He complained. "Every time I take a load away more comes out of the hill."

We watched as he took the next load away and sure enough more appeared from the hill. It seemed to be coming from an opening and a tunnel sloping up into the hill.

"Keep at it Sammy, I think your winning." said Toby.

"Give it a few more buckets."

Ten more, fifteen more, twenty more and still the rubble came out. The dust was choking. We could hardly see.

"I'm taking a break." Sammy was coughing.

We walked back down to the trucks and had a cuppa.

This piece looked easy yesterday. How could a simple rock fall do this to us?

The dust had settled when we went back to start work.

Sammy was there first. "Oh my god, look at this."

There was a pair of old leather boots on top of the pile, stuck into them was some bones, leg bones dressed in an old pair of woollen trousers. It was so dry in there that the clothes hadn't rotted away.

"A miner must have been trapped by a rock fall." I said.

"What a horrible way to go."

"Dunno what to do now." Sammy said. "Should get the police I suppose."

"Nah, they won't be very interested. Looks like it happened years ago." Murray said.

“If we just put the bones in a sack we can drop them into D C Mace latter in the week.” I suggested.

We did just that but there wasn’t just one skeleton, there were three. I wondered where their stash of gold was. At least James’ Gold would be put to good use.

Eventually we cleared the track and moved on. The area we had blasted had settled down.

“Do with a heavy rain to wash any loose stuff down”

Sammy informed us. “But it looks safe enough.”

Sammy pushed a few rocks over the edge and we all drove on up to Sammy’s truck.

“Bloody hell.” Sammy exclaimed. “Take a look at this.”

All the rubber had been pulled out around the front window. “Fucking Keas.”

We had a bit of a laugh about Sammy’s misfortune and Murray reckoned the bird shit on the bonnet could be worth good money. “Sell it to the Japanese.” He suggested.

We taped the window in with hundred mile an hour tape and with Anita driving Sammy’s truck we headed back to the hut for a very late lunch.

More Mud

“Let’s take a look at the next part before it gets too late.”

I said “We have to find it first.”

There was a big Pakihi swamp to get around but once we were in the bush the track should be able to be found.

We got to the end of the road. There was a fence, a big one. I could see a track on the other side winding its way in the general direction we wanted to go. None of my maps showed this as private land. Back a bit was an old Tramway. Could we use that to get in there? But whose fence? Would we be on private land even if we could get around the Tramway? We had to know. No Cell Phone reception and for the first time wished we had an H F Radio with us.

Bugger, there really was only one thing for it. I would have to go out to Westport in the morning and check with Barry at DOC.

We headed back to the hut a bit pissed off. We had done so much today and achieved so little.

I walked into the hut after taking another look at my maps. “Who fust jarted?” I asked.

“I’ve got fetty sweet.” Murray said.

“I’ve got a follen swanie.” said Toby.

Anita hit him then said “Next time I’m fiscusted, I’ll give you a nick in the knackers.”

Jezz they are a good bunch. A tough day, frustrating, still ready for some fun.

We ripped the tops of the Macs Gold and settled in for the evening. It was drizzling when I suggested to Anita she cook us tea. She hit me.

Westport

It rained steadily all night and was getting heavier when I set off for Westport. I had Murray with me. The others were going to take a run up Skeleton Track as we now called this part of Hemi's Track and head over the tops towards James's camp.

The creeks were already flowing well, all but one had a simple bridge.

We rolled into Westport and parked outside the DOC office. A new lady was at the desk. We introduced ourselves and asked for Barry,

"Which one?" She asked.

"Both." I said. We were shown into the room at the back of the building again.

"Shit you guys caused a problem for us up at Bully Town." Wellington Barry said. "You really got me in the shit."

"How's that?" I asked.

"Well it was one of you guys done it."

"No way man, we caught the bloke, sure it turned out to be someone I knew from way back, but it was Maria's Ex Husband that did her in." I was not having him blame us even if Murray had been sort of involved.

"You stuffed it by moving the body." I accused him

"Anyway" I settled myself down. "I'm not here to accuse anyone of anything. Cops tell me you're in the clear anyway. Look we are getting through this track we told you about. We've come over from Reefton and we're in the back of Charleston, in the Mississippi and there is a fence. Its public land isn't it.? Can we get through?"

"Yeah that fence is used by some chopper guys. They poach deer in there. We don't really care too much. Can you repair the fence if you cut it?"

We were away again.
As we drove back I remember a story about some
Chopper Hunters up near Taupo.

They were going out shooting and a mate they knew was
going fishing.

They knew the patch he always fished. So thought they
would have some fun

They buzzed over him and he waved.

They headed away from the lake and came back in
behind him just below the ridge. They came over the
ridge all guns blazing putting shot after shot into the
water near their mate.

Their mate took off out of the water so fast he was almost
running on top of it.

That night at the pub they all meet up. The helicopter
guys didn't say anything. Neither did their Fisherman
Mate.

It finally got the better of one of the Helicopter Guys and
he said "I see you can walk on water." The fisherman
looked at him blankly. "You know today down by the
lake." Still a blank look "We put those shots into the
water beside you and you walked on water getting out of
there."

"Wasn't me mate. I arrived at my spot this morning and
there was already some bloke fishing there."

It was still raining, not really heavy coast rain but real
steady. We headed up to the hut, had a cuppa with the
others and armed with cutters headed for the fence.

Boof had the fence cut in no time.

"We'll have to join it up later when we come back out."
Murray said.

“Yeah. There’s no way we will get all the way to Bully town today, not with our late start.” I said.

“Gezz, look at the mud, could get interesting.” Anita said.

The track leading across the swamp had obviously been lifted up at some time. Mostly by Punga logs laid across the track side by side. Most were well and truly rotted away. This looked like a real challenge.

We put Boof out front. He had his Simex 35” tyres on. Almost new they had lots of grip. The only thing missing on Boof’s truck were rear lockers. He’s won lots of mud plugs in the past with the same set up. He kept telling us it was experience, tyres, tyres and tyres.

Within 20 Metres Boof wasn’t going anywhere. At least not without his winch. His winch is electric and high speed. With a ground anchor set up about 40 Metres ahead he was soon winching onto firm ground. I was next up and almost drove it. If I had had my Boggers on I would have. I’m sure.

A quick tug and I was through. Boof headed on and I waited for Sammy.

“What’s wrong with your trucks?” Sammy called over the radio as he drove straight through.

The track was getting better as we drove it in turn.

Meanwhile Boof was winching again.

“Anita can you drive your truck and Toby can you come up and help Boof?” I called.

Toby came up and was in time to help feed the cable home.

I didn’t need a tow this time and neither did anyone else.

I'm Sinking

"Holy snapping duck shit." Boof on the radio. "Someone get a rope on me quick."

I raced up behind him, Toby was out of the truck but there was only the back of the truck out of the muck. The front was completely immersed. Over half way up the Windscreen.

"I'm still sinking, hurry up." Boof was panicking.

"Turn your motor of." Sammy was behind me now.

"Don't want water in the snorkel."

The way he had been going down this was a real danger. When water gets into the engine through the Air Cleaner it can and usually does some major damage. This can be very expensive with repairs often well over \$3000. So this was good thinking from Sammy.

I had a rope on Boof; Sammy had a rope on me.

"Okay, now," we both pulled together. Nothing, Boof didn't even move.

"Hurry up guys," Boof was anxious to get out. "It's getting wet in here."

The truck had stopped sinking, but if I took tension off to have a bit of a run up Boof would sink again.

There wasn't room on firm ground behind Sammy to hook on another truck and the next lot of firm ground was 50 Metres back.

"Anita, you stay there, Murray hook on the back of Anita. We will winch from you Anita, while Sammy and I tow."

I had the recovery underway.

"Boof. When you start moving backwards start your motor and give us a hand."

All that happened was Anita and Murray got pulled closer to Sammy. Boof didn't move.

“Okay, Murray set your Ground Anchor up and hook onto that.” Hell this was serious.

We could end up straightening a tow hook here. Boof was okay as we were hooked on through a pintle.

“I’m going to put my winch onto Boof. I’ll use a snatch block.” I said.

“Use two.” Boof shouted over the radio. “I’m sitting in water and its bloody cold.”

I did. Is it 27000lb or 36000lb? I can’t remember but that’s a lot. Sammy behind me with 2 ton of pull. Anita with 9000lb and Murray and the Ground Anchor to hold us all together.

This is the biggest pull we have ever attempted. And it worked. As soon as Boof started moving the suction was broken and out he popped.

We put all our gear away while Boof emptied out his truck. A change of clothes and a cuppa.

“Looks like the tracks buggered up ahead.” Murray said.

“The way it sort of went sideways at first makes me think I drove off it.” Boof said. “Can’t see with most of the track covered in water.”

“Lets grab a stick and poke around, see what we can find.” I suggested.

It seemed that the track took a slight left turn and Boof had driven straight ahead.

“Toby, you mind getting your feet wet? I asked. “Can you walk out up front? Keep Boof on the track.”

Toby set off and I got Murray at the back to put the odd marker in. We didn’t want the same thing happening on the way out.

And Back

We were still about a km from the bush and we were beginning to get short on daylight. I didn't fancy driving back in the dark and there was no way to turn around.

Reversing through that lot wouldn't be fun.

I suppose if we really had to, I mean really, really had to, we could leave the trucks and walk out. Now that's a dirty four letter word and we hated leaving our trucks in the bush.

I gave the options I had thought off over the radio.

"Hey Gordon, don't your lights work?" This from Sammy.

"The tracks hard enough to see in daylight let alone at night." I said.

"Lets keep going and if it gets dark, well it gets dark" was Toby's words of wisdom.

"Ed to Gordon, you there Gordon?" The radio was full off static but understandable.

"What the hell are you doing here?"

"Had to be here for the final push." The closer he got the better the reception. "Got Karl and Chris with me."

"We're in a little bit of mud at the end of the road, through the fence we cut."

"So when we get to the fence we just come on through?"

"No. We've got a bit of a problem." I explained that we were pushing on and coming back out in the dark.

"Why not leave the trucks there and walk out to the fence. We can take you back to the hut." Was Ed's suggestion.

The others all agreed and we started walking. It's not easy walking in mud and at times it was almost knee deep, certainly over the top of my Westland Slippers several times.

I was really struggling. My knees are not the best at any time. For years I have been a keen outdoors person. Tramping the hills and the valleys. I added it up one day using a South Island map and came to the conclusion that I had walked from one end of the South Island to the other over the years. Strangely enough I have never been tramping in the North Island.

When my knees packed it in it seemed like I had lost a huge part of my life. A couple of weekends a month would be spent in the hills and the odd week of holidays as well.

I had always looked on 4WD as second class ruining my peace and quiet. Several times I had turned down offers to 'throw my pack in the back' preferring to do it the 'hard way'.

It was always good to get off the beaten track, to go where there was no where others could drive. As trampers there are huge areas of New Zealand where you just can't take a vehicle. Where they can't be disturbed by the rumble of a diesel motor.

So when I took up 4WDing there was a bit of mixed emotions. I was extremely happy to be able to get back to the places I love so much. I was limited in where I could go but at least I could enjoy the hills again. And I realised there were thousands of square kilometres that a trampers could go without any fear of meeting up with a 4WD.

It meant I could share the beauty and fresh air again with people that were there for the same reasons I was. I could take my Son and Grandson with me. Show them and perhaps one day they might take a pack and put it on their back to explore other areas on foot.

We eventually made it to the fence. Smiles all around and a Macs Gold for the workers. Only the workers. We have a rule, No booze for the drivers until the day is done. 10 minutes to the hut and a big cleanup. Our clothes were so covered in mud it would have been easier to toss them away.

A Loaded Pineapple

We were sitting around with a Macs Gold each when Chris said. "I Fust Jarted."

And he had. It was like the fire siren had gone off. 10 of us in the hut and 9 bailed out the door as quick as. We could hear Chris inside splitting his sides with laughter.

"Gezz mate what crawled up your arse and died."

Murray wanted to know.

"Been there awhile to stink like that mate." Karl said.

"Get out you filthy bugger." from Anita. "You're not coming back in here until you bury it."

"Give it a funeral mate." Karl suggested. "Write a eulogy."

Me I just stayed out side retching.

Eventually the sinking brown cloud had lifted and we all returned inside.

We talked about our last couple of days. How the Dirty Digger had been a huge help, the fence and how few kms we had achieved since Ed and the others had returned home. We told them about the skeletons we had unearthed.

Tomorrow we would use the Dirty Digger again as we hoped to be back in the bush. It looked tough going up the ridge and who knew what we would find in there.

Karl had bought over a treat for us. A pineapple. Not just an ordinary pineapple, but a loaded one. The top had been cut off and the core removed. White Rum had been poured in until it was filled, the top put back on and sealed with Glad Wrap. Then left to marinate for a few days. Food of the Gods.

After the pineapple out came the Tawny Port. It was going to be another night of lies.

Logs

Anita wasn't well in the morning, in fact she wasn't well 3 times before breakfast. Not that she had any breakfast, just coffee, then she wasn't well again. Must have been something she ate.

We set out shortly after 9. The Dirty Digger up front. Through the fence and into the mud, Detour around 'Boofs Mistake' then up to the trucks. They looked cold and forlorn. Hardly a part of any of the paintwork was showing through the mud on any of the trucks. They were well preserved, mummified.

There was no way to put the Dirty Digger in front; there just was no room to pass. Boof grovelled his way over the swamp road. Winching, being towed backwards to have another go but always making progress. I was being towed from time to time and Anita was being towed just a little. She shouldn't really have been driving in her unwell state. Maybe it is morning sickness.

By 11.30 Boof had reached the trees and soon after we were all out of the swamp. The track ahead was easily seen but was going to take an effort. The chainsaw was going to be put to good use. There was a wind throw ahead of us. 50 to 60 Metres of fallen trees. Some big ones. But mainly trees with smaller diaMetre trunks. The trees left and right of the track were down too. A couple of hundred Metres each way.

The bush is self supporting and as a patch of bush grows it supports and protects the tress around it. In a strong wind if just one tree goes over it puts extra pressure on the next. It's weaker because the tree next to it has been protecting it and so on. 'Wind Throws' have been known to cover several hectares. They're a natural phenomenon

and as the trees rot away they create the compost and growing medium for the next generation of trees. Already in this 'Wind Throw' the seeding trees had reached about 2 Metres and were almost impenetrable. This Wind Throw would have happened within the last 5 years.

With the dirty Digger to help we were able to cut much larger pieces out of the logs across the track. We were always very careful and watchful for the log that might stand up.

By late afternoon we had cut enough wood to keep the fires of Christchurch burning for the winter and we were on our way. We had some minor repair to do to the track with the Dirty Digger. Pushed a few smaller fallen trees out of the way, filled in a few washouts and by 6 we were almost at the top.

Time to head back to the hut.

It was looking good to get this part of Hemi's Track finished by tomorrow night.

Kicked Out

Smoke was coming from the chimney as we approached the hut. As we got closer I could see a chopper in the clearing in front of the hut. Closer still I could see all our gear, sleeping bags, cooking gear, food, and our Macs Gold all lying outside in the drizzle.

It seemed the huts owners had arrived and even though a sign in the hut said we were welcome it was quite clear we were not.

We pulled up beside the chopper and were met by 4 angry looking blokes. One had a rifle cradled in his arms. "You bastards cut the fence." Not a question but a statement. This bloke was very tall and built like the bloke in the Mr Muscle adverts. But he was clearly ready to show he was pissed off.

"Yeah with DOC's permission." I told him. "We got the gear to fix it when were finished."

"Doing what?" He wanted to know.

"We're pushing a 4x4 track through to the coast. What's with tossing our gear out into the rain?"

Trespassers don't have rights." The Billy Bush look alike with the rifle interjected.

"We thought we were welcome to use the hut." Murray said. "That's what the sign says in there."

"Get your gear, fix the fence and bugger off." Mr Muscle said.

"Yeah piss off quick." Billy changed the position of the rifle.

We got our gear together and headed out. I was thinking we would give them a day or so then go back in once they had gone. We only needed one more day in there anyway.

I'd give DOC a call to let them know what happened.

Back to Reefton

We were heading back to Westport when I had a sudden thought.

“Hey guys lets go into James’ camp? Got some stuff to pick up that he gave us.”

Everyone agreed so we turned up the Buller Gorge and a bit over an hour later we were booking into the Old Nurses Hostel Backpackers in Reefton. They were real pleased to see us, especially as there were so many of us this time. All of the crew were there.

We dried our gear overnight in the laundry while we had a good attempt at getting rid of the Macs Gold before it went off.

I reminded the guys about the gold that James had left us. How before he had died that he wanted us to do something with it. Training for 4WD drivers and stuff like that.

For the rest of the night we just told lies.

The next morning was perfect as we headed up Rocky Creek to James’ camp. Pin Ball Alley didn’t seem so hard to get through. We had a wee bit of work to do at the old dam site as more rubble had slipped down the hill and blocked the stream off again, but this was soon fixed. and James’ camp was just as we left it that fateful day not too long ago.

At the camp I followed his instructions and soon found the old sheet of iron. I lifted it up and removed the sheet of plastic. I lifted the fertilizer bag up and underneath it was nothing but 90% pure gold. Loads of it. Hundreds and hundreds of chunks, some tiny and weighting a couple of pounds. Some really big ones of several pounds. One really huge one the size and shape of James’ tea billy. Most though were 4-8 pounds or so. We carted

it out to my truck, but it was soon obvious that the weight would be too much for the Prado. Too much for 2 trucks. Even tough on 3 trucks. We spread the load over 4 trucks, packed up as much of the other gear as we could and made our way out slowly.

We had more than a tonne of gold. Millions of dollars worth. James had lived as a hermit with just the filthy clothes he wore. Meagre supplies, a hovel to sleep in and hard work that finally killed him. Yet he was likely one of New Zealand's wealthiest men. Sad, very sad.

The manager at the BNZ in Westport had kittens when we showed him what we had in the back of my truck.

When he saw what was in the other 3 trucks he was speechless. Before we left, he had arranged a security company as a special guard on the bank over the weekend and a special Armoured Truck to get the Gold to the big city vaults in Christchurch on Monday.

Somehow the local Newspaper had already got wind of the gold and were chasing us through the forestry roads and tracks in the Mississippi area.

We soon left them behind.

We intended to camp tonight and make a big push tomorrow for Bully Town. Sammy still had his Dirty Digger parked up in the bush and this would be well used. I had been away from home for nearly 4 weeks. I needed spend some time there. We had agreed to set up a charity trust with all of us as Trustees to look after James' money once the gold had been sold. The main aim was to improve the image of 4WDing in general through education and training. A lot of the money would be spent developing Hemi's Track, not only the section from near Reefton to the Coast, but all the way from the plains.

Helping Doc in fragile areas with protection methods was another item high on the agenda. Fencing and Signage would be provided. The money would go along way with volunteers from the 4x4 clubs doing a lot of the work.

We were in a sombre mood at our camp. The night was fine and we sat around the camp fire, realising what were about to achieve but knowing this was our last night together for awhile. We were a good team and our new responsibilities hung heavily on our shoulders.

The mood lightened as the Macs Gold flowed and the glow from the camp fire continued well into the wee small hours.

Places to go, things to do.

“Come on you lazy pack of bastards.” Karl was yelling at the top of his voice. “We’ve got places to go, things to do.”

I looked at my watch. I had only had 2 hours sleep and it was 7 o’clock. Bloody hell.

I crawled out of my tent. Ed had his head between his legs and was calling Akaroa, without the big white telephone. He wasn’t well. Must have been something he ate. Maybe I ate it too. The only one who can’t have had what made everyone crook was Karl. “Prick” Why was he so cheery?

We cut the fence and fixed it. Later we would put a gate in here. The trust would pay for it. The track through the bog would be marked so no one fell off it.

We were soon in the bush and had Sammy’s Dirty Digger heading up the final slope to the top.

The track along the long ridge line was quite obvious and was easy to follow. Gorse was our biggest obstacle and there was always a fear of a washout and the Dirty Digger falling in it. Sammy filled in lots of these as we made steady progress.

“Only 3k to go.” I informed the others over the UHF radio.

Up front the track cleared and Ed took his rightful place at the lead. The aerial photographs had shown this part of the track quite clearly and I wondered why it wasn’t so overgrown.

“This tracks been used.” Ed said. “Been something in here. Long time ago though.”

There were wheel ruts, wider than even Chris’s Pig.

“What do you reckon made the ruts? Murray asked.

“These ruts are about 8 inches wider than us.”

“Some sort of truck.” was Karl’s suggestion.

“Unimog.” Anita had the answer. “We did some tracks down on the coast near Jacksons, in the Taipo. The Army uses the area and the ruts were about this wide”

“Remember that Seddon wanted an escape route? Maybe the Army has been up here.” Murray suggested.

It seemed like the obvious reason, but they hadn’t pushed on.

“What about that clearing up the top?” Boof said. “Could be a helicopter landing site.”

The track had been relatively clear up to here. But what about the gorse we had tried to push through down at Bully Town? It was about 8 foot high and thick. No one had been through there. Maybe we should have had a better look around.

By now we were heading down hill and being lower down the gorse was growing like crazy.

“Hey Gordon.” Ed was calling me. “Which way?”

“Waddaya mean? Which way?”

“The track splits.”

“Dunno mate. Go, I dunno, right. See where that goes.”

There was no sign of a second track on the photographs. We were a couple of hundred Metres down the track and Sammy was up front again pushing hard against the gorse with the Dirty Digger. My GPS was telling me we should have gone left, but hell a track is there to be explored. It was looking like this was going to come out further up Leek Creek. Maybe that’s how the Army got up here.

By now the GPS was showing Leek Creek on the map display and we were only a Kilometre away.

Are we there Yet?

A steep section downhill had Sammy moving quickly pushing Gorse aside and we were fair bowling along behind him.

“I’m there, at the town.” Sammy shouted over the radio. I pulled in behind him.

The gas light standards stood up amongst the gorse growing in the main street. The drab Olive Green paint was peeled away from exposed rotten walls. The window shutters were mostly fallen off or at odd angles. The iron roofs were badly rusted and this wasn’t the Bully Town we knew.

This was the town Hemi and his Dad had come through. More Questions than Answers.

Fable of the Sandfly

It fell upon a certain fine day that Namu the Sandfly and Naeroa the Mosquito foregathered, when the former said, “Friend, let us go and assail Man, and consume his blood.” Naeroa proposed to wait until nightfall, lest they be seen and slain by Man. The Sandfly folk declined to wait, and so set off in great numbers to attack Man. But, as they settled on him, he smote them with his great hand, and lo, a myriad went down to death! Thronged the Sandfly folk about the face of Man, only to meet the slapping hand, and truly a multitude perished. Sadly the survivors returned, and reported, “We are no more; nor numbers, nor courage availed us.” Then Naeroa the Mosquito sang his lament for the slain:—

I said, I said,
“Remain, remain,
Lest slain ye be
By slapping hand of Man.”
Alas! Alas!
Behold your fate.

Then sorely wept Namu, lamenting his lost kin, and so sang the following dirge:—

What matters death,
What matters death,
Now that his blood,
Now that his blood
Is welling forth?

Thus we see that the Sandfly folk reek not of death so long as they can shed the blood of Man.