



Overview - Club activity in the Greenstone and Caples Valleys

The earliest OTC association with the Greenstone Valley pre-dates the club, with an early Otago Daily Times report describing a trip undertaken by Mr. O. Balk (first OTC President) and Mr. J. Edgar in 1920. The pair went up the Greenstone Valley to Lake Howden (adjacent to the Routeburn Track), and instead of continuing to the track that ran alongside Lakes Lockie, Fergus and Gunn (West Eglinton Valley), they elected to traverse the range between the Greenstone and Eglinton - today we know this as the Livingstone Mountains. Mr. Balk reached a height of 4,600ft (1,400m) from where fine views of Lakes Marion, Gunn, Fergus and Lockie were obtained - a view of 'unsurpassed loveliness'.

The first OTC trip that mentions the Greenstone Valley was the 1926/27 Christmas Trip, and was listed as Cecil Peak & Greenstone, although Miss Elizabeth Tweedie's diary of the trip only mentions the ascent of Cecil Peak and trips into the much closer Lochy River (the club would have based themselves at Cecil Peak Station, in Collins Creek, so unlikely to have ventured further up the lake to the Greenstone).

The next trip that may have visited the Greenstone and Caples Valleys was the 1927-28 Christmas trip, which was based at Kinloch - but as there was no road access between Kinloch and Elfin Bay this is also unverified (although the area had access via the lake steamers).

The first verified trip to the Greenstone and Caples Valleys was the 1971 Christmas Trip (advertised as a Greenstone / Routeburn Trip), led by Pauline Robilliard and Eleanor Doig. Road access to the Greenstone confluence is relatively recent, so the party appeared to have travelled by boat from Queenstown to the wharf at either Kinloch or Elfin Bay.

Since then there have been at least 30 weekend or longer trips that have all or in part featured the Greenstone / Caples Valleys. Trips have included the full circuit (both from The Divide and Birchdale/Elfin Bay), traverses over both Home Hill and Steele Creek, as well as trips into and through the upper feeder valleys of the Caples (Kay and Frasers Creeks).

A smaller round trip from Elfin Bay to Greenstone Hut via Lake Rere has been completed a couple of times in more recent times.

Notable OTC / OTMC Trips

January 1-7, 1971

This is possibly the only official OTC trip to the Greenstone (*the club named changed to the OTMC in August 1971*)

December 1977 (Xmas Trip)

The Greenstone Valley is included in a 9-Day circuit comprising the Rockburn, Routeburn and Greenstone

January 25-26, 1986

A party of three completed the rare crossing of Home Hill from the Greenstone, arriving in the Caples near the former Birchdale Homestead

April 4-5, 1987

The first Bushcraft optional trip to the area. Unfortunately one of the participants who selected an easy-moderate trip ended up doing the full circuit over two days, which resulted in the trip returning to Dunedin very late - luckily this didn't put the participant off and she went on to be a strong club leader, included several terms as President.

February 6-7, 1988

A large party traversed the Caples, Kay Creek & Scott Creeks in perfect summer conditions. The tops above the Kay / Scott saddle were climbed for expansive views.

November 20, 2010

A planned trip over the Routeburn in a day was changed to a Divide - McKellar - Caples trip due to snow conditions above Lake Harris.

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Greenstone / Caples Three Day Weekend

DATE: October 22-23, 2022 (*Labour Weekend*)

GRADE: All

MEET: Clubrooms, 6pm (Fri, October 21)

LEADER: Antony Pettinger

The 2022 3-Day Labour Weekend trip to the Greenstone / Caples area is the first multi-day on the 100 Trips for 100 Years programme, and will be from the Birchdale end (Lake Wakatipu / Greenstone River confluence). The trip is suitable for all trampers, with the intention that parties of similar fitness and / or aspirations will be arranged - this allows parties to do different trips within the area.

Options include:

- Greenstone / Caples circuit: DoC promote this trip as a 3-night / 4-day trip, however it is possible to complete the 61km circuit in 3 days (and the OTMC members have completed the circuit in two days in the past). There are options to camp (which allows the days to be broken into similar tramping times), or use the network of huts, although the DoC huts don't really suit a three day trip. In days gone by, the Upper Caples and Mid-Greenstone huts were good options for a three-day trip (these huts are now owned and managed by the New Zealand Deerstalkers Association, and can be booked). If camping, then campsites between Greenstone and McKellar Huts, and near the Upper Caples hut would be obvious locations (tramping time is then around 20km per day).
- Greenstone Valley - Home Hill - Caples: This appears to be a pretty rare trip, and I'm only aware of one club party who completed the crossover early in 1986. The 1986 party camped at the bushline to the south of Home Hill (Greenstone side) and had a pleasant trip over Home Hill and down the ridge that leads to the old Birchdale Homestead. Note that this is private property, and permission will be required.
- Greenstone Valley - Steel Creek - Caples: An alternate, and popular, crossover between the two main valleys. This trip has been completed in both directions on past club trips - the Caples side is a step climb, while the Greenstone side is more gradual. While a bit shorter than the full Greenstone / Caples circuit, this trip can be a pleasant three-day trip (and was last completed by the club during Labour Weekend 2021).
- Day trips in either valley: The Caples maybe has the better choice of day trips, especially if you use or camp near Upper Caples Hut - from here you can visit McKellar Saddle, the rarely visited Fraser Creek, or the more commonly used Kay Creek.
- Caples / Kay Creek / Scott Creek: If transport can be arranged, a crossover from the Caples to the Dart Valley is a pleasant trip. The section from Kay Creek Hut to the basin in Scott Creek is untracked, but is easy travel. This trip was the feature of the January 1988 trip, before Kay and Scott Creeks were significantly changed during the big flood of 1994.

Photos from past OTC / OTMC Trips to this area



Old Birchdale Homestead (downstream from Mid Caples Hut on the true right of the Caples). OTMC party on February 6, 1988.



Mid section of Kay Creek, looking towards pass that leads to Steele Creek. February 6, 1988 - these flats are now covered in flood gravels.



Approaching saddle that leads to Steele Creek (Caples side) - OTMC Trip, November 7, 1992



View looking down the Greenstone Valley, from near the Mid-Greenstone Hut

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Selected list of OTC / OTMC Trips to this area

Date	Trip (as listed)	Leader	Notes
Dec 25, 1926 - Jan 1, 1927	Cecil Peak & Up Greenstone	Not listed	
January 1-7, 1971	Greenstone / Routeburn (Christmas Trip)	Pauline Robilliard & Eleanor Doig	Trip report in Feb 1971 Bulletin.
November 9-10, 1974	Greenstone / Caples Area	Murray Kokich	First weekend trip to the Greenstone / Caples.
December 10-11, 1983	Caples / Greenstone (All), or Rockburn (F+)	Barry Flamank	
January 25-26, 1986	Routeburn / Caples Area	Bill Provan	Party of two completed full circuit, party of three went over Home Hill.
April 4-5, 1987	Greenstone / Caples (post Bushcraft 1987 trip)	Antony Pettinger	One Bushcraft participant was dragged around the full circuit in two days, very late out, but a great effort.
February 6-7, 1988	Greenstone / Caples	Antony Pettinger	12 or so completed the Kay Creek / Scott Creek crossover.
November 24-25, 1990	Routeburn / Caples / Greenstone (through trip)	David Barnes	
November 7-8, 1992	Greenstone / Caples	Elspeth Gold	Seven went over Steele Creek (from the Caples side)
July 10-14, 1995	Upper Caples Hut Base Camp (mid week trip)	Ian Sime	
March 1-2, 1997	Greenstone / Caples / Fraser Col	Nigel Boydell	BC1997 was cancelled, this was the only remnant that went ahead, trip was Scott / Kay / Caples (late home)
March 24-25, 2000	Greenstones / Caples (Bushcraft 2000)	Ron Minnema	First Bushcraft Optional Trip to head for the Greenstone / Caples
September 25-26, 2004	Caples / Kay Creek / Scott Creek	Rob Lawrence	
March 28-29, 2009	Greenstone / Caples	Wolfgang Gerber	Two went over Kay Creek / Scott Creek - others in and out Caples

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