

Story & Photography by ROB GREENAWAY

THIS GHOST STORY STARTED for me in about 1985—my second year at university—and led to one of the most vivid experiences I could ever have imagined. A rumour was about Lincoln College that several members of the class had recently vacated an alpine hut soon after midnight and under unusual circumstances. Circumstances that they were not prepared to discuss. But trampers and students like talking about their epic trips, and soon enough the full story came out.

Mike and Jeff (not their real names of course) had been hunting in the Mingha Valley—one rib off the main divide north of Arthur's Pass. They crossed over Temple Col in the late evening of a snowy autumn day, and headed to Page Memorial Shelter. It is a lonely little day-hut built for skiers in Temple Basin, set apart from the rest of the club skifield buildings by a 20 minute walk, and one hours' climb above State Highway 73. The church-like southern wall framed Mount Rolleston and the potbelly stove warmed the final dinner of their trip.

They retired for the night (as all good ghost stories go) in the front room of the shelter, with its two bunks a few metres from the only outside door. At 10pm Mike woke to hear a trumper approaching, heralded by footsteps crunching in the snow and ringing on the rocks. The footfalls fell silent at the door and Mike craned his neck around the corner to see the trumper enter. Nothing. Must have been snow falling off the roof, warmed by the stove, Mike thought.

He fell into a light doze, but once again heard footsteps in the distance approaching the hut. He woke Jeff and they both listened to the crunching snow. Again the footfalls stopped at the door. Mike raised himself on his elbow and looked out the window. In the darkness he saw only night through the misted glass. Taking a torch he looked out the door. No footprints marked the entrance but their own.

Mike and Jeff lay in their sleeping bags in the dark discussing strange noises they had heard on other hunting trips. Possums screaming, wekas crying like lonely babies, tree limbs grinding, wailing and moaning, and snow settling when the temperature changed. "... as it must be doing now," Mike suggested.

Jeff agreed. They fell silent, but had difficulty returning to sleep.

"Here it comes again," whispered Mike. He slid quietly out of his bag and waited by the door as the footfalls approached. At the last minute—just before he reckoned the night-tramper would be reaching for the handle—he swung open the door and lit the scene with his torch.

Cold and silent, the night was waiting. But nothing else.



Page Memorial Shelter—Temple Basin.

"Spooky," he laughed to Jeff, and returned to his bunk. Wide awake they waited, with the torch on.

Within twenty minutes the sounds came for the fourth time, and again stopped at the entrance. "I heard the door handle move," whispered Mike. "I heard the bloody door move. I'm watching it next time."

The next time was not far off. The footfalls started about 50 metres from the hut and out of the silence they grew to the full, heavy noise of tramping boots in the crisp night snow. Mike watched the handle as the

night-tramper reached for it.

It moved.

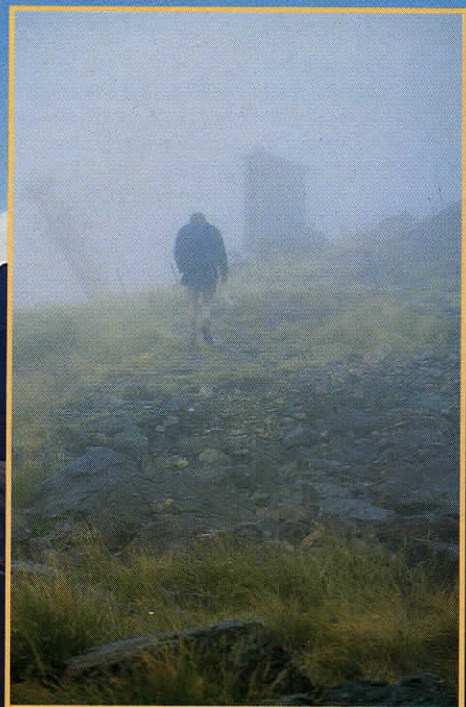
"Jeff, the handle moved. Man, it moved." Mike kicked the door open and stood back. Nothing.

"I'm gone."

"I'll join you."

They threw their gear together and headed down the mountain.

The following night in a local pub, they mentioned that they'd spent a night at Page, not saying anything about the noises. The barmaid leant forward, put her forearms on



It happened in the silence that exists only in alpine huts on windless nights. Footsteps that never reached their destination. Footfalls of forgotten mountaineers, aiming for a point of safety that they never found in reality, and never entered in whatever realm they now exist.

A GHOSTLY PAGE FROM THE HISTORY OF TEMPLE BASIN

OLD HAUNTS

the bar and said quietly, "My father—he was a surveyor—he bolted out of there at 2 o'clock in the morning. Wouldn't say why, but they reckon it's haunted. Did you see anything?"

"No," said Mike. "We didn't see a thing."

Mike and Jeff didn't know it at the time, but their story was remarkably similar to that of trapper John Aitken and a friend who stayed in Page Shelter in the early seventies. His account is written in Robyn Jenkin's *New Zealand Ghost Book*. Their version is identical in almost every detail. Aitken and his

colleague took the initiative to stand outside the hut, in the dark, waiting to see who was making the noise.

They wrapped up well and crept outside, into the wind and rain, ready to wait in the shadow of the hut till they heard the sound again, and then to shine their torches on the visitor. Five minutes later and the footsteps came again, sharp ringing sounds of boots on rocks, only about six metres away. They turned on their torches, to show—nothing.

Aitken and his friend checked the snow for footprints, found none, and with skin

prickling, decided it was time to leave.

John Charles, an Arthur's Pass resident of 35 years, who for 28 of those years was a ranger with Arthur's Pass National Park in Temple Basin, had Aitken's ghost story on his mind when he spent a memorable night alone at Page Shelter.

"I was lying in my cot, trying to sleep, but all I could think of was ghosts. At about 10pm I heard something in the kitchen. I lay there for a while hoping it would go away, closing my eyes. It grew louder and eventually I had to check it out. There was



A trumper finds shelter at Page—and contemplates the long night ahead.

no power on in those days—just matches and a candle.”

Charles crept towards the kitchen door, alone, in silence and in the dark, and put his head round the corner.

“Who’s there?” he yelled.

Something flew off the server, sailed through the air and crashed onto the table right by his arm.

“I came that close to dying of fright—and so did the possum,” he later recounted.

Katherine Peet, a long-term associate of the Temple Basin Ski Area, says the ghost of Page Shelter even has a name—*Hooma Hoochi*.

“As kids we used to be told ghost stories to get us to bed quickly,” Katherine recalls. “The tales were of *Hooma*, who used to base himself around Ribbon Falls in the Cassidy Basin, just east of Temple. If you were feeling particularly wicked you would go there for a skinny-dip, but if you weren’t careful, *Hooma Hoochi* would get you.

“When I heard that Page Shelter was haunted I was initially unsure whether it was a new ghost or just *Hooma* moving location. I am now certain that *Hooma* is the Page ghost.”

ALFRED PAGE, A CANTERBURY mountaineer, was one of the first to survey Temple Basin for its suitability as a skifield. Alfred’s first son Robin Page and his wife Nancy became key members of the ski club. With his young son Fred, Robin Page would regularly explore the Temple Basin area, with one particular rock in the Downhill Basin known as their personal landmark.

Fred Page died in his teens after an accident aboard an ocean liner on the way to England in September of 1959. Robin Page had died 18 months previously.

In memoriam to her husband and son, Nancy Page donated a legacy for a ski shelter to be built. She chose the lonely rock that her family associated with Robin and

Fred as the site for what is now known as Page Memorial Shelter.

A more recent story tells of several trampers spending a night in the hut, chatting and finishing their evening meal. They heard loud noises coming from far below the floor, and laughed it off as being made by rats crawling among the piles. That was until someone looked and discovered the hut had a concrete base, poured onto the solid rock of Temple Basin.

Later in the evening the group heard a knock from outside. No one was there. After the third bout of knocking they could stand it no more and left the shelter immediately.

After hearing of these stories I grew interested in Page Shelter myself—and began spending weekends at the hut. “Ghost hunting” I called it, and I usually took a few friends for company, only mentioning the haunting once the hour’s climb from Arthur’s Pass had been completed.

In 1988 I visited Page Shelter for the last time, wandering up the steep climb with another unsuspecting friend during a warm spring spell—an ideal time to visit. Late spring is best—the gentians are out and the sun warms the northern face of the shelter.

My Austrian tramping friend and I watched the sunset stream up Arthur’s Pass while we emptied a meal from the hut’s battered aluminium pots, and as the temperature dropped we warmed the building with coal left over from the ski season.

We settled down for the night on our closed-cell foam mats laid along the bench seats which trace the wall. We said our goodnights and fell into a trumper’s happy sleep.

I awoke to the sensation of movement. In the darkness I felt my sleeping mat moving beneath me—the foam sliding over the timber of the bench—every imperfection tracing a line up my body. I felt my body ride over a bumpy joint in the timber. I lay frozen.

My self-motivated mat took me to the end

DOING IT

PAGE MEMORIAL Shelter is not designed for overnight accommodation and although it is not actively discouraged by DOC and the Temple Basin Ski Area, it is not exactly encouraged.

Normal hut fee criteria apply. Don’t go in winter—the regularity of avalanches means you too could form the ghostly evening entertainment. The hut is also often completely buried in snow. Just around the corner the Temple Basin Ski Area has been voted the top snow boarding destination in New Zealand and a popular snow boarders’ weekend festival is held each year. The NZ Snow Safety Institute also bases dozens of alpine craft courses at Temple Basin’s array of new accommodation facilities, and the ski club is even offering these for fully catered summer conferences. Nutcracker tows service one of the country’s most interesting—and cheap—club skifields (phone and fax 03 355 9480).

Page Shelter sits quietly in Downhill Basin. Visit in late spring or early summer, and catch the gentians in bloom—November is best. At all times keep to the tracks—the trampling of alpine herb gardens when they’re half frozen does them no good. DOC and the Temple Basin Ski Area are currently working out who should own the shelter, so be wary of any changes in management policy.



Gentian field before Mt. Rolleston.

of the bench and stopped. I had made, and had heard, no noise. My colleague was sound asleep, her head resting on a bundle of clothes near where mine had recently been, three metres away.

The pulling sensation on the mat then switched to near my head and again it carried me along the bench, until I was back where I had been minutes before.

I lay in the darkness eyes wide with adrenaline, but looking at nothing. The ghost hunter had met his quarry—but there was nothing physical to see, let alone capture. That night is forever etched in my mind—my own ghostly page in the haunting of the Page Memorial Shelter. ☘