

3-10-2014

Storm of a Century and Freshers' Tramping Trip

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Recommended Citation

Kreifels, Emily, "Storm of a Century and Freshers' Tramping Trip" (2014). *2013-14 Postcards*. Article. Submission 15.
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Storm of a Century and Freshers' Tramping Trip 03/10/2014



View from the summit

First of all, tramping is the Kiwi word for hiking. And second of all, these two things did not happen at the same time. Thank God.

The beginning of this week we had a three-day storm. The first day it was rainy, but not anything out of the ordinary for a native Washingtonian, so I didn't think anything of it. But then it kept raining and the wind started. There were wind gusts in the city center of 100km/hr (60mph) and higher up on the hill outside of the city. They hadn't seen wind speeds like that in 40 years. The wind was enough to ground flights in and out of Christchurch for a day and a half. It also kept raining and raining and raining. In 24 hours Christchurch had 100mm (almost 4 inches of rain!) which was more than they had had in a 24-hour period in 100 years. The entire city was on flood watch and some of the pictures online were quite impressive. My flatmate and a couple of our friends and I needed food for dinner, so being crazy Americans, we put on our hiking boots and rain pants and walked to the grocery store... In the middle of the giant storm. It stopped raining eventually and the sun came back out.

They say you are not truly initiated into New Zealand until you go on a good old tramp. Well, I am now officially initiated. I signed up for the Tramping Club here at the Uni and every year they do a Freshers' Tramping Trip, a kind of welcome to the club hiking adventure. There are four levels of hiking in NZ: easy, medium, hard and stupid. I signed up for the medium hike because I'm athletic but I didn't want to kill myself. There were 89 of us on the trip, mostly international students, but quite a few Kiwis as well. The hike started out great. We walked on a dirt path along a river for the first couple of hours, then stopped and had lunch. I was thinking, "Oh this is super easy, I should have picked hard." I ate my words. We left the trail and started bushwhacking up a mountain. Well, the organizers

of the trip didn't actually test the route and the "medium" level ended up being much harder than the hard level. The plan was to go up a ridge, cross over to another ridge and then down the other side. The ridge was much, much longer and steeper than anticipated. It's amazing what your body can do when you're exhausted, but you have no choice other than to keep going. Like when it's dark and you're still several kilometers from the campsite and you're tired and hungry and thirsty. I've never done anything so physically demanding before, but I learned things about how much I can do and I hope to take some of that mentality back to racing for next year.

The way back we followed the easy route back to the buses. It really wasn't that bad of a walk, but it was made more challenging by having tired, sore muscles and giant blisters. The entire hike was somewhere between 45 and 50 kilometers (ask a runner how much that is. It's a lot!) and 800m of elevation gain and then descent because we had to climb back down the mountain to get to our campsite. All with a 25 lb. pack. All and all, I feel very accomplished for climbing that mountain this weekend!

Until next time,

Emily