

## **FRIENDS' AGM**

**WEDNESDAY 18TH NOVEMBER**

**Venue:** Hocken Library Seminar Room, 90 Anzac Ave, Dunedin

**5.10pm** – Refreshments

**5.30pm** – Annual General Meeting

Presentation of Annual Report and Balance Sheet  
Election of Officers  
General Business

We expect the business of the Friends will be done promptly and that at:

**6.15pm** - Mike Hamblyn will speak on the research he has conducted to date on the history of [Newbold's Bookshop](#). This has been his particular interest for some time, and what he has to say will be of interest to many whose memories of Dunedin go back a few decades.

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## **2020 – TALK SERIES**

Wheeling, dealing and Moa Collecting was the subject of Dr Rosi Crane, Honorary Curator History of Science, Otago Museum, on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> September. This marked the Friends' annual event, celebrating the Anniversary of the Trust Deed giving Dr Hocken's collections to the people of Dunedin. It proved to be a popular event, and over 50 attended the occasion in the Hutton Theatre at the Museum.

Dr Crane whose particular interest is 19<sup>th</sup>-century New Zealand science, concentrated on the earlier

years of the assembling of the Museum's remarkable collection. Her knowledge of her subject was encyclopaedic, and her pleasure in sharing the story with her audience was evident.

At the conclusion of the talk a couple of dozen Friends went across the road to Ombrellos for a celebrator dinner.

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## **COLIN MCCAHOON - ANNIVERSARY EXHIBITION**

This opened on August 15<sup>th</sup> and some of you will already have taken the time to view what is an outstanding presentation of the artist's work. Hocken's holdings are unique and they are presented in such a way that the viewer has both the time and the space to consider the nature and influence of McCahon's work within the larger history of New Zealand art.

Arrangements will be made for an exhibition floor talk for the Friends by the Pictorial Collections Curator, Robyn Notman. The matter is to be raised at the AGM on November 18<sup>th</sup> when a date will be set.

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The compiler of *Flotsam and Jetsam*, the occasional newsletter of the Friends of the Hocken Collections, is delighted that Dr Laurence Fearnley, a member of the Committee accepted the suggestion that she might write on an aspect of the Collection with which she has intimate experience - the story of mountaineering in this country. You will find what follows on pp. 2 and 3 fascinating, and maybe, surprising.

## TRAVELLING IN THE IMAGINATION: How the Hocken archives can inspire fiction writers

In 2016, mountaineer and author Paul Hersey and I were privileged to receive the inaugural Friends of the Hocken Collections award to research and compile *To the Mountains: A Collection of New Zealand Alpine Writing* (Otago University Press, 2018).

Many weeks were spent searching through numerous archives in the Hocken Library reading published and unpublished material such as journals, bulletins, letters, diaries, memoirs, and notebooks in order to gather together a diverse range of mountaineering literature for inclusion in our anthology. We were particularly fortunate that the Hocken contains an extremely rich collection of mountain-themed resources, notable amongst them the archives of the New Zealand Alpine Club (MS1164).

Though I was wearing my 'research' beanie and looking for nonfiction material, there were many times when the novelist and fiction writer within me felt a rush of excitement, a timely reminder of the value of archival material to fiction writers in terms of sparking the imagination, and fuelling the narrative urge.



Handwritten notebooks, often pocket sized and written in sharpened pencil, were my particular love and each time I handled such items I felt the thrill of proximity to their maker. Though she was by no means the only engaging author I encountered,

traveller and mountaineer Dora Hallenstein de Beer (1891-1982) captured and held my attention every time I happened upon her work. Here was a woman who, from a young age, was driven by curiosity to set out into the world in search of adventure.

The more I read her work, the more convinced I became that de Beer would make a wonderful protagonist in a novel, a mountaineering equivalent, perhaps, of 1930s aviator Jean Batten, captured in Fiona Kidman's remarkable novel *The Infinite Air* (Penguin Random House, 2018).

Born in Melbourne but resident in Dunedin from a very young age, de Beer made her first trips into the back country and mountains of the South Island during the start of the 1920s. Her 'Account of a trip to Waiho' (MS 1392/092) detailing a journey by coach over the Otira Pass to the West Coast, and then by pack horse from the Waiho River (Franz Josef) to Weheka (Fox Glacier) in

company of the mail man during November 1920, introduces us to the wonderful enthusiasm with which de Beer embraces the natural world. Despite spending eight hours in the saddle, on unformed bullock tracks, she observes that "We had been told it was a beautiful road, and were not disappointed. All the cuttings were coated with mosses of exquisite colours, from the tenderest green to all the pretty madder shades. Often we looked down a gully filled with tree ferns, and to my thinking the best way to see a tree fern is from above..."

This extract perfectly captures the unexpected, and original, way that de Beer often approaches wilderness. Her vantage point is never predictable; indeed, as a mature woman, she notes in 'Alpine Walking' (MS-1392/095) that one of the great 'compensations' awaiting the older mountaineer is the 'great pleasure and satisfaction' of 'going round mountains instead of up them', a welcome relief from the more common mindset of first ascents and 'peak bagging'.

De Beer left New Zealand at the beginning of the 1930s and made her base in England. She now had several seasons mountaineering behind her and from her home in London she began to make solo trips to the European Alps. In 'Travel Diary of a trip to Italy and Germany' (MS 1392/039) — another tiny pocket diary — de Beer describes packing her Lancia with her belongings before heading off to catch the car ferry to Holland. The year is 1936, and from Holland she follows the road through Germany, via Cologne and Heidelberg, until crossing the border into Switzerland at Basel. Along the way she is inconvenienced by blown tyres, a broken exhaust and troublesome officials but eventually makes it to the mountains of the Swiss/Italian alps where, with the aid of guides, she spends the summer climbing numerous peaks around the altitude of 3500-4000 metres (11,000-13,000 feet).

In all her writing about her European climbing trips, very little attention or information is given to the political, social or cultural climate of the day. Her 'List of Climbs' notebook (MS -1392/091) notes her ascents in France (Mont Blanc via the Peuterey Ridge, 4840m), and Switzerland during the mid-1930s, as well as those made while in New Zealand in 1937 but, disappointingly, there is nothing beyond the mountain to flesh out the story.

Then in 1938, there is an in-depth 'Travel diary of a trip to Hong Kong and China' (MS 1392/050). Again, this is a small pocket diary, written in pencil, on lined pages but, for ease of reading, a printed version is available: her privately published narrative: *Yunnan - 1938: Account of a Journey in south-west China* (Oxford: Dora de Beer, 1971).

This 1938 expedition is notable for several reasons, and not just for the fact that deBeer was 47 years old when she joined the six-month long expedition to make the first ascent of Satseto in the Yunnan Province, a mountain that was estimated by the climbing party to be around 20 000 feet high (18 360ft is the actual height). This attempt on the mountain is regarded as the first overseas expedition ever staged from New Zealand and it was initiated and led by a woman, Marie Byles. Byles was, in fact, Australian but had acquired much of her mountaineering experience in New Zealand, often partnering skilled South Canterbury mountaineer, Marjorie Edgar Jones, another member of the expedition to Yunnan. Two Mount Cook/Hermitage based guides were employed to lead the way up the mountain: Kurt Suter and Mick Bowie. Along with Byles, Edgar Jones and de Beer, was an enthusiastic, though less experienced Australian mountaineer, Fraser Radcliffe.

De Beer, who travelled from London to meet the team in Burma at the beginning of August 1938, was largely responsible for organising the mountaineering equipment required by both the team members and the local porters, a job made all the more difficult as a result of not knowing the measurements or boot size of the porters.

From Rangoon, the group made the journey by train as far as Myitkyina but from there travelled with a large mule caravan until they arrived at the town of Li-kiang (Lijiang), close to the Yangtze river, near the Tibetan border. In total, this first stage of the journey took forty-two days, and covered over 400 miles (600 km). In typical fashion, de Beer brushes aside the discomfort of the trek when she notes that 'Aeroplanes and motor cars undoubtedly save time but one learns far more about a country if one goes on foot or on horseback, and what a mule caravan lacks in comfort, it makes up in interest.' She is aware that 'such journeys now perhaps belong to a nostalgic past', part of her reason for recording the trip in such detail. Wary of bandits, fearful of being mistaken for foreign spies, and frightened by wolves, the group eventually set up camp at the base of the mountain only to encounter day after day, week after week, of pouring rain and freezing cold. Satseto is rarely visible due to cloud and mist and when they do manage to venture onto its slopes they encounter difficult snow-slicked terrain and ferocious winds that sound like an 'express train' and 'could pluck climbers from the mountain as easily as they could ripe plums from a tree'.

From their first base, they manage to climb no higher than 15,800ft and so, a month after arriving, they move around the mountain to attempt the summit from a different angle. This second approach, from the Pehshui

Valley, is no more successful, but de Beer's descriptions of the limestone river valley scenery, the pine tree covered slopes, and the alpine meadows blue with flowering gentians clearly indicate how much she enjoyed simply being present in such a location. Typical of her descriptions is this one of a high camp: 'The tents were pitched under spruce and tree rhododendrons with a romantic view through their branches to range after range of hills. The moon was full and the beauty almost unearthly.'

Time and time again they attempt to progress up the mountain but the weather is appalling, and heavy snow made climbing not only difficult but dangerous. As she notes: 'The snow had to be shaken off the tents every few hours for fear of them collapsing under the weight. There was just enough charcoal for a tiny fire in the big tent — ours was like a refrigerator, even though I lit a candle during the night to try and warm it — and our wet clothes froze.'

Despite several more attempts to climb Satseto, the group never reaches its summit and, in fact, the mountain is not climbed until 1987, when an American team made the first ascent. De Beer says Satseto was 'like a dream mountain' and it was her intention to revisit it in the future but the '1939 war put an end to all thoughts of returning, as I had hoped, to see the flowers in springtime'.

Dora de Beer's interest in mountaineering continued, however. Already a long-time supporter and member of the New Zealand Alpine Club (which admitted both men and women), she was made president of the Ladies' Alpine Club (Britain) in 1970, the last woman to hold the post before women were finally permitted to join the (British) Alpine Club in 1974, and the two clubs merged.

As I worked my way slowly through de Beer's notebooks and accounts, I too had thoughts of 'returning' to her as the subject and protagonist of a novel. It strikes me that she made the most of her position in society to live the mountaineering life she desired: one that fulfilled her sense of adventure, gave her a sense of purpose, and satisfied her sense of curiosity. Whether I write a novel based on her adventures, or not, one thing is very clear: the Hocken Collections provide an extraordinary and valuable springboard for the imagination, and I encourage all fiction writers to make use of the archives.

**Laurence Fearnley**

## TALK SERIES PLANS - 2021

**March:** Professor Pat Langhorne, New Zealand's foremost sea-ice scientist, is set down to speak on her subject which is one of immense significance.

**May:** Sue Wootton, Dunedin poet, and this year's Katherine Mansfield Fellow will speak on a topic relating to her Medical/Humanities Research.

**July:** Professor Henry Johnson - A History of Chinese Music in New Zealand

**September:** Dr Jonathan West, this year's recipient the FOHC Award. We hope he will be in a position to share with us the final results of all his work at our "Signing of the Deed of Trust" Anniversary.

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## RESEARCH AWARD

Plans are in hand for another Research Award to be finalised in 2021. This is becoming a feature of our programme, but it cannot happen without support from the Friends themselves.

The matter will be discussed at the coming AGM, and members will have a further opportunity to purchase the first Award book – *To the mountains: a selection of New Zealand alpine writing*.

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## HOCKEN NEWS

Professor Barbara Brookes' Hocken Lecture, originally set down for October 1<sup>st</sup>, is now re-scheduled for Tuesday, 1<sup>st</sup> December.

The last issue of F&J highlighted the predicament of the Collection in respect to staff appointments. It was more than encouraging to be advised by the Hocken Librarian that approval had been received for appointments to a number of roles that are considered critical to library services. Four vacancies have been recently filled and two others have been advertised. All being well, it will be possible for any remaining vacancies to be advertised early in 2021.

In response to the first official review of the University Library Review recommendations, the University Council has called for a review of the

Hocken Collections to take place at the end of 2021. This will involve quite a significant amount of preparation in advance of the actual review. Terms of reference are being prepared.

Accountability is a term so often in use, and Hocken Collections, as a recipient directly or indirectly of Government funding, is not spared the resulting paperwork. This year, for example, there has been a revaluation of both the Photographs and the Publications collections – a time-consuming process as might be imagined.

Insurance probably comes under a similar heading. The University insurer asked for a risk assessment around the Hocken Library building's fire detection and protection systems.

Such things have to be done, but at what cost (in terms of time consumed) to the Collections' key tasks.

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## PS

Is it unrealistic to hope that with the prospect of a stable, one-party Government, some more attention will be given to institutions like the Hocken?

A gentle reminder to those who have not yet renewed their subscriptions for the current year. Please contact Sara Barham, Membership Secretary, [hockenfriends@gmail.com](mailto:hockenfriends@gmail.com) or 021 611 776 if you have any questions.

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## FOHC MEMBERSHIP

*Subscriptions: Individual: \$30 per annum; Life Member \$250  
Joint: \$30 per annum; Joint Life Member \$300*

*Friends are reminded of that subscriptions are due, and to note that cheques can no longer be accepted.*

*Online payment: Westpac 03 0903 0393175 000 - "Subscription" in Particulars field, surname/initials in Code/ Reference fields.*

*Prepared by Donald Phillipps for the Friends of the Hocken Collections  
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