

# The Arête

Volume 49, Summer 2018

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# New Zealand Summer Guiding

Story and Photos (where not indicated) By Alex Geary



French Mountain Guide Nicolas Honneger guiding Yoko up the Summit Rocks on Aoraki/Mt Cook.

*Editor's Note - One of the joys of belonging to an internationally recognized guides association is having the opportunity to pack up and move to other IFMGA countries for extended periods where you can guide in foreign mountain ranges and experience different cultures, with a fairly seamless transition. Not many professions allow this, so we should consider ourselves lucky. Here, Canadian Mountain Guide Alex Geary explains his experience guiding on the other side of the planet.*

"You can see Australia on a bad day!" a client told me as we looked out across the Tasman Sea from the head of the Franz Josef Glacier. It took me a few seconds to catch on...

I'd been wanting to return and explore the mountains in New Zealand since my first ski trip to the Tasman Glacier in 2004. The Waddington Range is the only place I've been to in Canada with the big relief and huge steep broken glaciers, comparable in size to what you can find in NZ. Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park has 19 peaks over 3000m rising straight out of the ocean, with Aoraki/Mt Cook being the highest in NZ at 3,754m.

I based myself out of Wanaka (a town about the same size as Revelstoke, BC) for five months while guiding for the internationally renowned Adventure Consultants during their summer 2017/2018 season. Working for them meant I didn't need a car and was paid for all my travel time. With the exception of trips

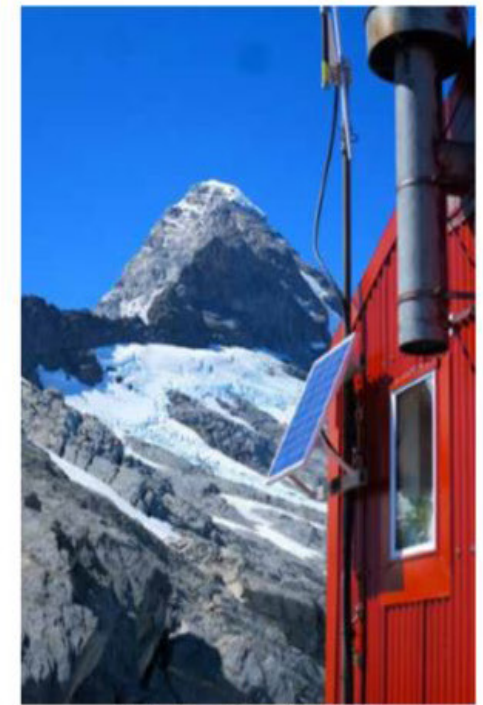
to climb Aoraki/Mt Cook or Mt Aspiring, none of the courses or "Ascent Weeks" have a fixed location, and most are about seven days long (including introductory mountaineering courses). This means you can go wherever you feel like each week on the South Island depending on weather and conditions (as long as you don't blow your weekly heli budget). I therefore ended up visiting all the major alpine climbing areas including Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park, Westland National Park (Fox and Franz Josef Glaciers), Mt Aspiring National Park, The Remarkables, and The Darran Mountains (Fiordland National Park). Despite how it might sound, with a pre-trip briefing from a senior guide and a full-time client liaison to take care of logistics, it wasn't too daunting.

It's quite complicated and expensive to get your own permits and insurance in NZ, so almost all the guides work for one of the big companies. They're always short of guides during the summer, so there is little competition between companies or guides, and everyone is very friendly and supportive. This atmosphere also seems to attract lots of easy-going foreign guides, some of whom have moved there permanently to escape the pressures of places like the Alps.

Working, climbing and hanging out with guides from Romania, Venezuela, France, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Nepal, Italy, Germany, USA, Britain, Australia, and of course New Zealand, was one of the highlights for me. Everyone brought experience from their own country, and it was really cool to



Dan climbing out of a crevasse on the way up Mt Madeline.



Mt Aspiring and the Colin Todd Hut.



Alex Geary climbing above Spaghetti Junction on Aoraki/Mt Cook. Photo: Cristina Pogacean



*Hayley exiting the Fox Glacier to the Chancellor Hut*

see everyone solving problems slightly differently. For example, while guiding a couloir on Aoraki one day; I was pitching it out on bolted anchors, another guide was pitching it out on snow anchors adjacent, another was simul-climbing with a Micro Traxion, and another passed us all using a tractor-pull.

Things I thought about NZ that turned out to be TRUE:

- The best cragging in NZ is at Arapiles
- The glaciers are big, steep and broken
- You spend a LOT of time walking under huge seracs while guiding Aoraki/Mt Cook
- Snow conditions are often amazing for alpine climbing
- I would get a lot of experience with snow anchors
- The South Island has a great, relaxed vibe
- There is lots of 1:1 guiding

Things I thought about NZ that turned out to be FALSE:

- Upright mid-clip pickets with cables are commonly used; In fact, I didn't see one all summer (almost everyone uses MSR Coyotes)
- All the alpine rock is Weet-Bix (chossy)
- There is less documentation than in Canada (I had all my per-

sonal gear inspected and documented before my first job)

- Safety standards are a bit loose
- I was going to have to do some long and gnarly approaches over big, dangerous moraines with a ginormous pack (it was almost entirely heli access)

On a side note; after reading "Tucker Talk" in the last issue of *The Arête*, I noticed that there seemed to be a higher percentage of female guides in NZ than Canada, and more women cranking harder than the men at the crags. A quick count on the NZMGA website showed 14% female Mountain Guides in NZ, which is more than double what we have in Canada. I wonder why this is...

If you're interested in working in NZ during the summer, their season starts late October and then tapers off by the end of March. They will help organize work permits for Canadians (IFMGA, Specialty and Apprentice Guides) if you commit to sticking around for at least a couple of months.

*ACMG Mountain Guide Alex Geary lives in Revelstoke, BC*