but I have come across Scholastica, Liberata, Consolata, and Fortunata and I think of the hopes and pride of the parents. And the sorrow of patris ignoti which followed the child through its life. One marriage about 1900 caught my eye. It was a British soldier marrying a Maltese girl. He was patris ignoti and so were both his comrades who were witnesses. Was the British Empire founded on the outcasts of society?

Nicknamed Sherlock Holmes

Before 1940 Malta was a series of small villages with little communication between them. Most of the population were small farmers, with a small middle class and a very small aristocracy. Many marriages were made in the same village and it is the custom to marry in the bride's village. It is difficult to trace the marriages and births when these have taken place in a different village or town. Fortunately, the British in the 1850s set up a public registry with separate registers in Malta and Gozo. With this you can also trace the marriages and births. But many were not notified by the priest, the local policeman lost the papers, mistakes occurred and were never discovered, and there were sizable communities of Maltese who travelled and married away from their home islands, in Gibraltar,

The buildings of the Lazaretto on the left facing the fortifications of Valletta. The buildings housed the infectious diseases hospital until the second world war and from 1947 to 1978. Beyond the last arch there was a ramp from the sea to unload provisions for those in quarantine.

[Joe Cardona, Attard, Malta]

Tunis, Tripoli, and Egypt. There are only about 80 common Maltese surnames. In one village for instance one in four has the surname Farrugia so everyone was known by a nickname. I am very proud to be called Sherlock Holmes for my finding of all the old polio records.

Tonight I shall cook swordfish and drink the local wine. I look across the bay to the island where Saint Paul was shipwrecked on his way to Rome and think how lucky I am to meet such marvellous, friendly people, and how privileged to have the time to do this research. But I will not thank Mrs Thatcher.

"The Milford Track—where on earth is that?"

H D W POWELL

This was the question that my wife asked an Australian orthopaedic wife during the spring meeting of the British Orthopaedic Association in Aviemore. The seed was sown. The offer, made shortly before I retired, of 12 months' locum at the Otago Medical School's orthopaedic department, saw us in the South Island of New Zealand early in 1985. Within two weeks we had booked for the track.

The second week of November found us at Te Anau in Fiordland by New Zealand's second largest lake, and we enjoyed an evening "preview" at the Tourist Hotel Corporation Hotel with slides and plenty of time for questions and general chat about the track. Packs and rainwear were on loan.

Noon the next day we gathered, 26 in the party, to start off for the first leg of the journey. Our group was a real mixture of ages, interests, and nationalities—two Californian professors (husband and wife); two secretaries also from California; Peter from Vermont, an organiser of bicycle tours in the United States; a couple from Canada; a goldsmith and his wife from Australia (he had just

climbed the Matterhorn); four Kiwis; just us from the United Kingdom; and our daughter visiting from Botswana. There was also someone who two years before had had a triple bypass operation; he did splendidly throughout the trip.

We left Te Anau by coach and drove north up the lake to Te Anau Downs, where we boarded a motor launch to take us to the head of the lake. We were joined on the launch by 24 Freedomwalkers; they carry all their bedding and food on the track, sleeping in National Park huts, whereas we slept in comfortable huts provided by the Tourist Hotel Corporation where we were well fed. We carried cotton sleeping bags, our personal gear, and lunch packages given to us each day. The sun was brilliant on that two hour stretch up the lake. Maps and glasses all came out to help us decide which peak was which; they rise covered in snow above the steep lower slopes, which are covered in thick native bush. We landed at a small pier, the start of the track, and then walked an easy mile through red and black beech forest to Glade House, our first night's stop.

Here the meadow, sloping gently down to the Clinton River, is covered with alpine strawberries. A pair of Canada geese flew over, and a family of wekas, the flightless woodhen, were busy scavenging for their supper, tossing dry grass and dead leaves in the air with their long beaks like so many little haymakers. The delightful warden and his wife, retired Southland farmers, welcomed us with tea, the huts were comfortable and the windows wire meshed against sandflies, and there was a wood fire as the evening grew chillier. To the west lay the track, guarded by Sentinel Peak in the heart of the Clinton Canyon. We couldn't resist a quick swim in the

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Clinton. An excellent meal preceded the evening session, at which we were introduced to the rest of the party. We all gave our Christian names and stuck pins in a world map on the wall to show where we lived. By the end of the track walking season that map will show a vast variety of home bases.

At the Mackinnon Memorial at the top of the pass.

Swinging above eels and trout

Day two. A large breakfast, sun on the tops but not yet in the valley. We left at nine o'clock over the longest swing bridge on the track, with eels and trout swimming below us in the river. At first the forests are mainly native beech, full of the song of tuis and bellbirds, but then we came to 300 metres of bare rock and boulders left by the 1980 landslip, a reminder of the savage forces of nature in this geologically unstable part of the world. At Six Mile Hut we stopped for lunch while the keas, the South Island parrot, entertained us. They are highly inquisitive and noisy and behave like real vandals; we had to watch our packs on the ground and the sandwiches in our hands.

The ridge of the Mackinnon Pass and Mount Balloon.

We went on in the warm sun to our first view of the Mackinnon Pass, looming up above us, past two waterfall fed lakes, inviting for another quick dip. We crossed more substantial slips and reached Pompolona Lodge, only a 500 feet rise in nine miles. This is a splendid new group of huts, built in 1983 in the surprisingly short time of five weeks in virgin forest. It replaced the old lodge, which was destroyed by an avalanche. A massive dam burst followed. Until a few years ago it was serviced by packhorses but now it has a small helicopter pad built out over the tree trunks left smashed to matchwood by the avalanche. There was time for hot showers, for a look at the remains of the wrecked lodge, and to marvel at the

Sutherland Falls—at 1904 feet, the world's fourth highest waterfall.

perpendicular canyon sides and the waterfall high up, which disappears as the wind catches the water and blows it away as spray. Another splendid meal and then some slides of the track ahead. One member of the family even managed some fishing before bed and the other two went to view a glacier which overhung the route that we had followed earlier in the day.

Day three. The wind was blowing hard from the west when we got up, the sky was clouding over, and the latest depression from the Tasman Sea was on its way. Off at eight o'clock, the first four miles flat and then the climb started, a series of zigzags, 12 of them, beautifully graded up to the Mackinnon Pass. From forest to bush and out into drizzle above the bush. Almost at the final zigzag we put on our heavy rain gear, woolly hats and gloves, and pressed on to the top, on to the ridge, where we really caught the full blast of the wind. We were higher than Snowdon and at 3835 feet we should have been able to see wonderful mountains in all directions, but scudding clouds and driving rain meant limited views and anyway it was hard to stand up against the wind. A mile beyond the memorial cairn to Quintin Mackinnon, who discovered the pass in 1888, is the pass hut, the fifth to be built on this site. The other four have been blown away; one has never been found. There we had the most welcome cup of coffee of the whole expedition and a cup of soup, which is provided only if it is really rough weather. We left after eating our sandwiches, feeling completely revived and thankful for

the shelter. We went out into a gale and heavy rain, but at least it was not a blizzard as then the track is closed and trampers have to sit it out in the hut until the weather improves.

Majestic Sutherland Falls

We followed the main rocky track, which goes 3000 feet down to Quintin Lodge, the next night's shelter. If the sun is shining the longer track has to be used to avoid avalanche danger from the glacier above. Despite the weather we enjoyed the beautiful Mount Cook lilies, actually a species of giant buttercup. There was a wide slip to cross on a newly built bridge, and then we were back in the bush heading for the Arthur Valley that we had only just glimpsed from the top. Once down into the rainforest there is a fascinating variety of ferns—crown ferns, tree ferns, and prickly shield ferns. Because of the heavy rain the waterfalls were at their best, so much so that after our welcome at Quintin Lodge most of us scrambled up for half an hour to see the Sutherland Falls, the fourth highest in the world at 1904 feet, a surging, majestic sight and sound as the water falls in three long downward leaps. Back at the hut the showers were hot, as was the drying room, and, totally unexpectedly, wine and beer were served "on the house." Dinner, the best yet, was New Zealand lamb. The generator goes off in all the huts at 10 o'clock and most people were ready for sleep by then.

Day four. Still raining when we woke up but not hard. We still had 13 miles to go, mostly downhill, with a rocky path at first and another rockslide to cross. Two members of the staff who work on track maintenance all through the tramping season live in a little hut called Boatshed where we had our stop for morning tea. We soon reached the splendid Mackay Falls and the Bell Rock, water worn inside so that a hollow bell shape has formed. In the rain forest beyond the falls everything was dripping, especially the great variety of mosses and parasitic plants growing on the trees. There were more ferns, hen and chicken fern and the beautiful Prince of Wales Feathers fern.

Board walks have been built to take the track across swamps, and at one point, at the end of the last century, gold miners were called in to dynamite the rock face and set a sort of wooden path cum ladder into the face. It reminded us that the route across from Te Anau to Milford Sound was discovered almost a century ago and for a large part of that time was, in reverse, the only link between Milford Sound and the interior. We walked above Lade Ada, a lake which formed when a large landslip blocked the Arthur River. We came to the Giant's Gate Falls and watched two pairs of blue duck in the pool at the foot of the falls. The cool wind off the water kept the sandflies away so it was a good place to eat our lunch without being eaten alive. From there it is a gentle path through the forest to Sandfly Point, the end of the track.

There we had to wait for the launch at four o'clock to cross the

At Milford Sound; Mitre Peak is left of centre.

Sound to Milford. We were glad of a recently built hut, not only for the cup of tea but for the protection from that bloodthirsty predator, the sandfly. Everyone took the conventional photograph with the background of the 33½ mile signpost.

Certificates of achievement

Then on the other side of the Sound—sheer luxury—baths and clean clothes at the hotel and a long cool drink where we were all presented with certificates of achievement. The reverse side of these now carries the names of all our fellow trampers. Then we had the final banquet meal; it was fun and quite unforgettable.

The next day we took a two hour trip down the Sound, the big peaks—the Mitre, the Lion, and the Elephant—were cloud capped, but the rain had filled up all the waterfalls so we were seeing them at their most spectacular. There were fur seals on the rocks and a colony of yellow crested penguins on one of the very few tiny beaches at the foot of a vertical cliff; most of these cliffs go straight down into the water.

Our journey back to Te Anau was yet another impressive one, up the Cleddau River, past the Chasm, and up to the Homer Tunnel, itself a remarkable engineering feat. Then steadily downhill with curtains of water cascading down the steep valley sides.

Back at Te Anau we said our goodbyes, collected our car, and drove off into another world.

Was it worth it? Yes, every mile of it and every dollar.

Would we do it again? Yes, if ever we get the chance.

MATERIA NON MEDICA

In reverse

As a child in the 'thirties I pressed my nose against the toyshop window to choose how to spend the pennies I clutched, but inside the shop I knew I must be careful to see that the toy I selected was British made and not German or Japanese, because, although cheap, they would be of poor quality or might break or not work. At home I would collect all the silver paper to take to kindergarten where we would build a giant ball of foil to sell for charity—the money being sent to Japan for the poor starving children after an earthquake or famine or some distant disaster.

Then, nothing at home was foreign made: now almost every piece of equipment is imported. At work it is as if Hounsfield and EMI had not invented computed tomography: our machines are German. It is as if Hopkins and Hirschowitz had not devised fiberoptics and flexible endoscopy: our endoscopes are all Japanese.

I am proud that one of "my" hospitals, St Charles's, still has and uses all its

original 1881 buildings, but when I showed a Scandinavian doctor one of our genuine intact Nightingale wards he blanched, saying, "I had read about these in history books but never thought I would ever see one still used." We continually and fruitlessly explain to the regional health authority and the DHSS that instead of our patch of inner city being wealthy enough to be RAWPed of a quarter of its revenue it is one of the most deprived parts of England.

They may not want to know but others in the world do. A young Japanese came to me as an outpatient. I asked, "What are you doing in North Kensington? Are you a tourist taken ill?" "No. Vee ess oh." He was taking a year off between school and university to do Voluntary Services Overseas helping the deprived in an underdeveloped country—mine.

J H BARON, consultant physician, London.