



Half **MAN,** half **MOUNTAIN**

Mac Alpine fingered the hole in his hiking shoe and threw me a smile.

"I climbed my 1551st Taranaki summit this morning," he said. Mac grew up in the shade of the 'Hill' – the locals' pet name for Mt Taranaki/Egmont – on the family farm near Oakura and he and his seven siblings were encouraged to explore the great outdoors from an early age.

His first summit was at age 11 with the Scouts and was his "most important". Now, with over 45 years of mountaineering experience behind him, from expeditions to the Southern Alps of New Zealand, to Nepal, India and Antarctica, he is one of the most qualified and knowledgeable mountain guides in the country.

We met in his garden and I was struck first by his impressive view of the cone-shaped mountain and second, by his pair of almost indecent stubbies! His face was well-weathered with smiley eye creases and buck teeth hiding shyly under a bushy moustache. 'I climbed Taranaki and survived', blazed from his T-shirt and although he modestly downplayed his achievements, he was eager to talk about how his boyhood passion became his career.

"I've always wanted to be fit," he said, and he always has been. He still holds the record for the Four Peaks Challenge, which he smashed by 47 minutes on March 31, 1981, climbing Mt Taranaki, the Kaitake

and Pouakai Ranges before running from Oakura to New Plymouth and climbing Paritutu Rock. It took him 10 hours and 10 minutes. No wonder he's been described as "half man, half mountain".

He worked for the Stratford Outdoor Pursuits Centre for many years, but started his own company, MacAlpine Guides in 1992. Since then business has boomed.

"The key to happy clients is finding out exactly what they want to achieve," he said. He asks people to think of three or four specific goals and is sometimes surprised by the answers.

"One Aussie woman wanted to crack a stock whip at the top of the mountain, other people want to kick footballs or hit golf balls. Last week I guided a man with one arm who just wanted to prove to himself that he could do it," he said.

I asked him about the future. A recent hip replacement operation has been a major set-back, but he's optimistic and looking forward to new personal challenges and a gradual shift in business focus. Instead of mountain guiding he will begin to concentrate on guided treks, kayaking, rock climbing, abseiling and corporate team-building activities.

Although he can no longer climb the Hill "faster than it took to mow the lawn", his enthusiasm is undiminished and he's as passionate as ever about seeing his clients living their dreams. His philosophy can be advice to us all: "don't be a gunna, get out there and do it".

Hybrid

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