



Hemi's Track

A 4WD Adventure of Discovery,
Mystery, Murder and Romance?

Written By Graham in
OVERSZ

Characters in this book are fictional and any resemblance to any person living or dead is coincidence only.

Situations are however based on fact and many are the embellished stories (lies) of actual events.

The Reader will have to decide which fact is and what fiction is.

Remember before attempting this portion of Hemi's Track by 4WD that you must obtain permission from the many property owners.

When the author has a few spare weeks an attempt will be made on driving the mid section of Hemi's Track. There might even be a 2nd book.

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Hemi

Many years ago an old Maori bloke I met up in the South Island High Country told me about this track his Father had taken him on when he was a young fella. They had gone from Hanging Rock, near Pleasant Point in South Canterbury to the mouth of a large river on the West Coast. It had taken them nearly 12 weeks and they had suffered terribly in the mountains. They had been caught by the weather and spent 10 days on a shingle beach on a river. One of the horses they had used to tow the dray had been injured in a fall and the food she provided was the only thing that saved Hemi and his Father.

Details of starting and finishing points were a bit confused as Hemi hadn't ventured to the West Coast for more than 60 years and he could only tell me that on the West Coast they had come out through a deserted town. He had no idea of its name and thought that maybe it didn't even have a name. It was completely set out with houses and Gas lights in the streets. The houses were all painted Olive Green and all the windows were shuttered. Hemi was old, well he looked old anyway, and nearing 75 I'd guess, but fit. Brown and wrinkled, his face had a permanent smile and frown all at the same time. Not a grey hair in his full head of curly black hair. You could see he was as comfortable in the hills as in the lounge in his house. His brown eyes were bright as he told his story.

He told me that the town was a secret, that the Government didn't want people to know about it. Now this must have been, well I'm 50, and I would have been 20 when Hemi told me about this place. So 60 years at

least since Hemi had been there, so at least 90 years ago. Maybe a bit longer than that even.

An Adventure coming on

Now I have only been 4 wheel driving for a couple of years and I remembered Hemi's story told so long ago. I got to thinking about it because I'm always trying to find somewhere new to go. I had never heard of a track that crossed the main divide apart from the State Highways and I've done a fair amount of Tramping in my days, so I knew my way around the South Island geography. I could think of many places along the main divide that trampers used, indeed the Maori used many of these before the white man came to New Zealand. Maybe it was the Haast before a road was put through, but Hemi had been definite about one thing, they had headed northwards.

For the hell of it I thought I would do a bit more research into this. Is it possible that there is an unknown track that's maybe suitable for 4WD from one coast to the other? And what's this secret town? Where is it?

Now I knew that Hemi would have long since passed away and that his own children would be getting on in years. I visited Pleasant Point, a nice little place a few kilometres inland from Timaru. Famous for its Steam Railway and Denheath Custard Squares. The Norwest wind was gusting and it was a warm day when I visited in October 2003. Inquiries took me to a dilapidated A frame house on the edge of the Kakahu Forest. Another few kilometres towards the hills. It sat low down on a bushy ridge with the forestry behind that. The track up to it was steep and full of pot holes. The house hadn't been painted for years and the wooden fence around it was falling down.

A lady wearing a blue polka dotted apron and an old pink dress opened the door to my knock. Her grey hair was almost covered by a black beanie. It was hard to tell her age but at a guess it was somewhere between 60 and 90. A smoker for sure and were the empty Gordon's Gin Bottles stacked neatly beside the back door hers or her husbands?

She gazed at me through smudged specs and greeted me like a long lost friend.

"Giddy, You lost?" She wanted to know. A big smile with some wide gaps "Good day for it, warm too."

The Norwest was sweeping down the valley and it was a pleasant 20 or so degrees.

"My names Gordon and a good few years ago I met an old bloke up in the hills, his name was Hemi. Does this mean any thing to you?"

"You mean Hemi, my father in law? He's working just now."

Puzzled I asked, "Doing what?"

"In horticulture" She laughed 'Grows daisies. Nah, Hemi's been dead for 22 years. Killed by a tree falling on his tent down in the Catlins. Poor bugger he loved the bush and it killed him, If he was gunna go it was where he would want to go. In the bush. I'm Donna his Daughter in law. Don's missus".

"Is Don about, can I talk to him. He might know something about a trip Hemi and his father did 90 odd years ago."

"Dons not too good. Been crook for weeks and now he's got pneumonia. Come in."

"Hi Don, I'm Gordon. Bit crook eh!" I told him why I was there.

Don looked about 80, his breathing laboured, his nose blue from lack of circulation. A bit paler than I remembered Hemi, but the smile frown was like looking at Hemi. Someone must knit beanies as Don had one pulled down over his ears just like the one Donna was wearing.

He was quite fuddled and talked as if his dad Hemi was there in his bed room.

Donna explained that Don was the last living descendent of Hemi and Myrtle and that in recent days Don and Hemi had had some 'curious conversations.'

I asked Don if he knew about this trip that his Father and Grandfather had undertaken some 90 years previously. He didn't seem to understand my question or indeed what I was talking about. As he spoke he drifted off to sleep. Donna suggested I come back in the morning as Don was often less confused in the mornings.

Mike

I stayed the night in the Pleasant Point Pub and it was there that I met up with a friend Michael; I hadn't seen Michael for many many years. He was still as I remember him, tall and lean. We'd been on a few tramping trips together and he was very fit. I always had to catch up. He'd be sitting on his pack or on a log waiting for me as I came huffing and puffing up the hill. As soon as I got there he was ready to go. We had kind of drifted apart when he started climbing mountains. I preferred it below the bush line.

I told him about my quest and amazingly he said "I remember, I was there when that old bloke told you about it. Remember we were in that hut up in the Hopkins and the old bloke wandered in just after dark?" It was all coming back to me now. Hemi was revisiting his old hunting block and arrived at the hut with the back steaks from a Chamois. He had shot it on a shingle Scree and just a few yards from the track.

Hemi cooked it fresh on the poker over the glowing embers of the fire. We had already eaten but Hemi insisted that Mike and I share the 2nd steak. It was the first time I had tasted Chamois and it was delicious. Tender and very tasty it was many years before I was lucky enough to try it again.

In front of the fire we had shared stories of our experiences of the hills and it was late in the evening that Hemi had told us about his journey with his father all those years ago.

Mike's eyes narrowed more as he remembered, "I had the impression that this town was somewhere between Greymouth and Westport or somewhere inland from there anyway." He couldn't say why he had got that impression but at least it was another starting point. We shouted each other jugs of Macs Gold until the Bar Manager said it was past his bed time. Mike and I made plans for the morning as he too had become interested in "Hemi's Track" as we now called it.

Don

Neither of us should have been driving when we headed off in my Toyota Prado next morning. If Geoff Smith, the local cop had got me to blow the bag I would have been in allsorts of shit. There was no sign of Geoff as we headed up to Dons old place near the bush. Mike was fairly quiet and I was wondering if his interest last night was more to do with the Jugs of Macs Gold we had consumed.

As we pulled into the steep track heading up to Don's place I could see Donna waving to us and as we parked up she beckoned to us to hurry.

I introduced Mike as we headed quickly to Dons bed room. Amazingly Don was sitting up and looking quite bright.

"Morning Gordon, morning Mike" he said.

Now this really blew me away. He had remembered my name from the day before but I had no idea how he knew Mike. Mike looked at me and shrugged his shoulders.

"Have we met?" Mike asked.

"Of course, you must remember that night up the back of Ohau" Don replied "I shot the Chamois and we cooked it over the fire."

Donna went a bit pale "That's not his voice, he sounds like his Father." She sat down on the only chair in the room.

Mike looked like he needed a seat and I knew I did too. My hangover hammered away and I was wondering if this was some strange dream. I don't believe in this hokus pokus stuff. The spirits visiting or speaking

through someone else is just an act. In my opinion it's all make believe.

But I was seeing this for myself. Don was very ill yesterday, Donna looks like she has seen a ghost and Mike and Don have never met before.

I sat down, still shaking a bit on the edge of the bed. Don looked at me and I shivered right down my spine.

"Well Gordon" he said "You were here yesterday and wanted to learn more about that track Dad and I used back in 1908."

Incredibly I was able to confirm, "Yes that was why I had come."

Mike had left the bed room and I could hear him outside, he was quite ill. This had really shaken him up.

Nervously I began, "You told us about the horse you ate and the terrible weather and how you almost died." I wasn't talking to Don now, I was talking to Hemi." Can you remember more about where you went?"

He began, "We had a load of Flax from the Pa at Kaiapoia and my Father had some Greenstone to collect from down the coast. We weren't meant to be doing this, it was not meant to be." He went on "My Father had upset the Queen of our tribe and had been sent from the Pa in disgrace and wanted to prove himself to the tribe." He faltered here, not knowing if he should tell us more. Eventually he said "you will need to swear to tell no one about what I am to tell you."

I considered this carefully. I was no longer sure I wanted to know more. This was scary stuff. I hesitated, and he said "I'll tell you of the track freely, but you must keep this other that I tell you secret."

"Okay." I agreed.

I can't tell you all that was spoken about in the next 2 hours, but can say if this had been public in 1908, history would have been changed. Hemi had taken a huge secret to his grave when he had died and "Hemi's Track" was just a tiny part of it.

I pretty much knew about where to start and thought I knew where it finished, or at least thought that I could find it. The South Island's not such a big place. Not anywhere near as big as Australia and it should be possible to sort out.

Donna and I went out to see how Mike was and found him snoring in the Prado.

Donna invited us to lunch and as we entered the kitchen we heard a thump come from the front of the house. It seemed the whole house had bounced on its foundations. We rushed down the hall to find Don on the floor beside his bed. I would find out no more about Hemi's Track from Don. He had breathed his last breath and fallen to the floor from his bed.

Mike and I comforted Donna and made contact with her niece who lived at Burkes Pass.

Donna had a cuppa and calmed down a bit. "It's for the best you know" she told us. "Don's been unwell for weeks. He's suffered so long. It was really tough on everyone. But I will miss him."

Already Donna was getting on with her life and I felt we were now intruding.

We said our goodbyes and Mike and I headed back down to Pleasant Point in the Prado.

Mike was quiet as we pulled up outside the pub. Neither of us felt like drinking so I had a Ginger Beer and Mike a Coke.

“Well what do you think?” I asked Mike “I wouldn’t mind finding this track.”

“I don’t think we have enough info” I could see Mike was reluctant. He had had a huge scare, so had I, but strangely I felt a bit more comfortable with it. Maybe it was because I had heard the whole story while Mike was sleeping off his hangover.

“I’m going to see what I can find out anyway” I told him “I’ll let you know what I find.”

We hadn’t talked much about what we had been doing with our lives lately and I asked Mike how his family were.

“Kids are great, Jim works at Matura works as a Slaughter man and in the off season has a job with a landscaper. Does a bit of fencing too. Jenny’s a home girl. Helps Bruce a bit on the farm but likes to be there for the kids”

“How’s the missus?” I asked innocently

“Don’t talk to me about that bitch. Walked out on me when Jenny got married. Cleaned me out. She’s living over on the Coast somewhere. Don’t want to ever see her again, nor do the kids”

That left a bit of a dent in the day. I hadn’t met her but she had been a keen tramper and had headed for the mountain tops with Mike. I remember she was quite a few years younger than him. The guys in the tramping club reckoned he would need to take a pram tramping to put her in.

Things were a bit morbid so I decided to head home to fire up the computer. Mike was heading home to Gore As I drove home I wondered if the best place to start was this town in the Bush on the West Coast. It must be easy enough to sort out. Just ask. There are no secrets in New

Zealand. And after all it was 95 years ago. Official information Act and all that stuff, it shouldn't be too hard to get the exact spot the track finishes, well near the end anyway. Then I can work back to where Don said they had started.

Murray

Back home I made a few calls to mates that had done a huge amount of 4 Wheel Driving. Murray especially had been every where. Where ever we went he knew about tracks no one else seemed to know about.

“You heard of a town on the Coast that’s deserted, Murray?” I asked him.

“Yea it’s called Shanty Town” was his quick reply.

“No not Shanty Town, this one’s a secret” I wasn’t making sense.

“If it’s a secret then how would I know about it?”

Murray was laughing at me.

I told him as much as I thought he should know. I didn’t want everyone knowing about it just yet. I wanted to get it sorted first.

“Yeah, I remember this guy in the pub one night over in Reefton.” Murray said, getting a bit serious now. “He was quite pissed and we were there on a trip with the Guys into Big River. I’d had a few Macs Gold too. This bloke was going on about a secret track into a secret town that no one was supposed to know about” Murray was silent for a moment. “You know how when you’re at the Pub on a 4WD trip, how every body knows places and when it comes down to it you can’t go there anyway? Well that’s how I treated this bloke. I can’t remember much more than that.”

Well now that’s two. Hemi and now this pissed bloke in the pub. Where there’s smoke there’s fire.

I had to wait until next morning before ringing DOC in Reefton so I got on the computer. I searched Google and

came up with this bloke that's been to every hut in the hills he can find. It seemed that if the hut was in the South Island then he had been there. If anyone knew about this town I felt sure that he would.

I sent him an email, not sure if I would catch him home. Surprisingly I got an email straight back. It seemed that he was in the hills at a hut way down on the Southern Coast. He had his Satellite Phone and his lap top he was keeping in touch with the World.

His reply didn't do me a lot of good though, but, it wasn't a NO. It was "why do you want to know?"

I figured he knew about it but wasn't saying so just yet. I emailed back, not telling him everything as I wasn't sure how much I wanted to tell him. He knew something I was sure. Did that make 3? I didn't hear back from him for almost 2 months. His news was old by then.

By midnight I had poured over my maps and had a very rough idea of the route Hemi's Father had used.

If I was going to phone DOC in the morning, it wouldn't be Reefton. I reckoned I had narrowed it down to either Westport or Punakaiki.

I rang DOC in Westport first and not knowing who to talk to, spoke to the receptionist. I asked her about the town, silence. Then "I'll put you through to Barry"

Well Barry's voice message said he was away from the office for the next 21 days. Was I being fobbed off? I rang back and more silence. I'm onto something here I thought. So I asked to speak to the area manager. Barry was away from his office for the next 21 days.

I'm onto something here, I can just feel it. There is some kind of conspiracy going on.

I tried the DOC centre at Punakaiki and spoke to a very helpful lady, but it turned out she was just a volunteer

and was happy to tell me all about the Pancake Rocks. Barry would be the best one to talk to in Westport.

Dead end! No not yet.

I rang my boss to say I was taking a few days leave.

Mary wasn't too happy with me but I was owed weeks in leave. This had become important to me.

Murray rang later that day. He had been thinking about this secret town and while he wasn't too sure, he had the impression that this bloke had talked about Charlestown.

"I remember him telling me about Charlestown and this monkey that was in a movie being shot there. He reckoned they should shoot the monkey."

"I'm keen to find out more Gordon" he said "I've been most places and an adventure wouldn't go amiss."

"I'm heading for the Coast in the morning." Thinking maybe I could put the hunt off a few days until Murray could go.

"Pick me up on the way. I'm coming too" Murray was enthusiastic.

I arrived to pick Murray up in the Prado at 8.30 next morning. He had his Prado on the road and all packed and ready to go. Murray was all nervous excitement. He had been 4 wheel driving for 20 odd years. Land Rovers, Jeeps, he even had a Ford once. Blue eyes, always clean shaven, a bit of a ladies man. Tall and well built with that distinguished greying hair. He didn't really look like the type that loves the mud and the river valleys our hobby takes us to. Happy and a go lucky type he was a quiet thinker too.

"If we go off road it's better to have more than one truck" was his good advice. We headed towards Westport talking on the UHF radios about our plans. I

wanted to call in at DOC in Westport before it closed for the day.

My instincts told me I was on the right track, that if it was there, I would find Hemi's secret town, that we would find "Hemi's Track"

We arrived at Springs Junction and stopped for a bite to eat and as we got into the truck Murray gave me a call on the Radio. He had a flat tyre, Bugger!

Karl

The big surprise though was another voice on the Radio.

“What are you blokes up to?”

“Who’s that” I asked.

“Karl. Is that you Gordon?”

“Yep. What are you doing here?” I asked. A bit suspicious that Murray might have jacked this up. Karl’s not a bad bloke. In on everything 4 wheel driving and handy to have around at a breakdown. He had helped me out of some awkward places in the past.

“Missus has dragged me over here. Got a sick Aunt in Westport” came his reply “What are you doing?”

“Doing a bit of exploring” I was cautious, I didn’t want to say too much over the Radio.

“I’m staying at the Motor Camp in Westport, not sure for how long, could be a week or so” Karl said as he drove into Springs Junction in his Prado.

Well that’s 3 Toyota Land Cruiser Prados. On club trips we’re known as the 3 Prados. Couldn’t be 3 better trucks together or 2 better blokes to have around. Maybe I’ll fill Karl in when we get to Westport.

We got Murray’s Highlift Jack out and while Karl jacked it up Murray took the flat off. I had the spare ready to go on and in 5 minutes we were on our way. Team work.

We drove in convoy up through the Shanondoah and over O’Sullivan’s bridge across the Buller River. Through the Buller Gorge Karl was getting inquisitive about our exploring. He wasn’t too keen on the idea of sitting around a motor camp for days waiting for Kitty to finish her duties to her Aunt. “Her Aunts a bitch anyway” Karl reported “She hit me, Kits just given me a hiding!”

“Maybe you deserved that.” Murray replied. Things were lightening up amongst us and by the time we drove into Westport I was ready to tell Karl all I knew about Hemi’s Track, Well maybe not all but enough.

All the Motels were full. There was an international car rally due through soon and Motels were booked solid.

Karl was happy to have some mates staying at the camp with him.

I left them to get things sorted at the camp and headed off to the DOC office.

Maria

“I’m looking for some answers” I told the uniformed DOC officer behind the counter.

“How can I help Sir?” Very pleasant.

“There’s a town up in the hills near here” I told her “I would like to know more about it”

Silence.

“Who can I talk to about it?” I asked.

“You will need to talk to Barry” she hadn’t denied the existence of the town just wasn’t going to tell me anything.

“And Barry’s away for the next 3 weeks right?”

“I’m afraid so” she said quietly.

I had the idea that maybe she wasn’t that happy about fobbing me off. That this was not the way she liked to do things. That she was acting on instructions. Whose instructions? Why? What could be so secret for so long? I decided to come clean with her. She was really a very pleasant young lady, Maria on her name badge. “Look, let me tell you a story, at the end either tell me to go away or tell me what I want to know.”

I started to tell her the story of the old Maori bloke in the hills, about his trip over the main divide, and the story he told me about the secret town.

“No more, not here” Maria had fear in her eyes. “Here’s my number” she wrote on a scrap of paper. “Call me tonight.”

I was getting somewhere, it seemed Maria might become a help rather than a hindrance. But why? What was so secret out there in the bush that nobody was to know about? Maybe we were to find out tonight.

I went back to the Motor Camp to find Murray and Karl under the bonnet of Murray's Prado. Thinking something was amiss I called, "What's up?"

"Nothing" Karl replied "just admiring the way Toyota put these together"

"That's a great truck eh Gordon? Bet you're pleased with yours." observed Murray.

"Glad I got one of these, instead of a Pig" I laughed. We call all Nissans, Pigs. Especially the Patrols and Safaris. It's the way they wallow in the mud. I used to have a wee Terrano, someone nick named it piglet. There are some hard cases in the club and I was thinking that if this got a bit sticky over here then there were a few blokes who would be keen on an adventure.

"How'd you get on with DOC?" Murray was keen to know.

"What's going on?" Karl asked. "You two got some secrets?"

"Lets have a beer and I'll fill you in." We headed for our Cabin while Murray grabbed a 6 pack of Macs Gold from the 12 volt fridge in his truck.

"It all started years ago." as I ripped the top off a condensation covered bottle.

Karl listened to the whole story, well as much as I wanted to tell him. Karl was enthralled. He had been to many places but had never heard of this town or a track all the way over the Main Divide.

"I've got a call to make." realising that it was near 7 and that the 6 pack was long gone.

I rang the number Maria had given me and a bloke answered the phone. "Barry speaking." What the hells going on I thought. I asked for Maria and he said "Are you the bloke that came in this afternoon."

I thought ‘here we go, another fobbing off’, I’d been block walled. But my fears were soon allayed.

“We need to meet.” Barry said. “But we can’t be seen in public.”

This was getting a bit odd, was my safety at risk? I was thinking about daggers and dark alleyways. But hey this is New Zealand. That sort of stuff doesn’t happen in New Zealand. Does it?

His next words had me going a bit shaky. “There is an alleyway between the DOC centre and the Real Estate office next door. Come round the back, there’s a door at the far corner, it’ll be unlocked.

I wasn’t too keen on this but with the three of us we would be okay. “What time?”

“Anytime, I’m there now.”

I told Karl and Murray. We all got a bit concerned. Karl reckoned that there were some pretty deep Tomo’s around Punakaiki that we would never be found in.

“Let’s think about this” Murray suggested. “If one of us stays outside and something goes wrong then, we can get help.”

I was glad now that we had bought Karl into this and wished that a few of the others had been here as well. Dazzer would have been handy and I knew he had a way of just taking time away from his job whenever he wanted. Chris the hard case Dutchman would be really enjoying himself too. I’ll see how it goes tonight and maybe make a few calls later.

Barry

Karl went down town in his Prado and parked up 50 Metres or so down the road from the DOC office.

Murray and I approached from the south end of town and could see a dim light on in the back of the office. We parked the Prado right outside and set the alarm. If we were dealt to and they tried to get rid of the truck then the alarm would go off.

Cautiously we walked down the alley, our senses working overtime. Were they waiting with a Ministry of Works crow bar?

There was no one else in the alley and no one in behind the DOC office. Light crept out under the door on the far corner of the building. I tried the door, it opened silently. "Come in quickly." Maria said urgently.

There were three people in the office, Maria and two blokes. Maria introduced them. "This is our Manager, Barry and this is our Bully Creek Conservation Area manager, Barry."

"I'm Gordon and this is Murray." We all shook hands and settled around the table as Maria made coffees.

The plot, well maybe just a bit of innocent confusion was becoming clearer. It seemed there were the two Barrie's and I thought I was being fobbed off, but why this clandestine meeting? Why all the secrecy?

Once we were all settled Maria started. "Gordon, can you tell us the entire story you started to tell me this afternoon. I've told the managers a little of it, or at least what you told me."

"Many years ago I met this old Maori bloke in the hills behind Lake Ohau." I told them all about my meeting with Don and the strange voice of Hemi. I told them as much as I wanted them to know.

In the silence that followed we all heard a noise out the back and someone coughed. Barry the manager sprung up from his seat like a coiled spring and wrenched the door open. Karl was standing there red faced. "I thought you guys had been kidnapped." he blurted out. "What's going on? You've been in here more than 3 hours." I introduced Karl and felt a bit silly when I told them that Karl was our backup outside.

Bully Town

“Well guys it seems you’ve stumbled onto a fairly well kept secret. Yes the town does exist, but I don’t think that tracks there anymore. Bully Creek.” Barry began. We listened intently as Barry told us the story.

Barry did and didn’t work for DOC; he was sort of on the payroll, but not really. He worked directly out of the Prime Ministers Office in Wellington and had flown down that evening by helicopter especially for this meeting.

In 1899 Richard John Seddon was New Zealand’s Prime Minister. He was a Coaster and an engineer in mining before that. He lived on the Coast and was fanatical about the region. At various times he was a Councillor and a Mayor of Kumara. He had been Minister for Public Works, Mines and Defence.

This story looked like it could become very interesting. Barry stopped here. “What I’m about to tell you is secret, top secret in fact. I need your word that you’ll never tell a living soul about it.”

“I can’t promise that” I told him. After all by now I had enough information to find the secret town and the beginnings of the track. That was what I was really interested in.

Sorry but that’s the end of the free bit. There are a total of 142 pages. You have had 25.

If you’re enjoying the story it’s going to cost you \$10.00 to read the rest. Follow the link to pay by credit card or send a cheque for \$10.00 to Hemi’s Track, Graham Pullman, R D 22, Geraldine. Include your email address and I will send you the full story.

<http://www.garden-gloves.co.nz/order.html> It’s the last item on the list
A part 2 is started and when it’s finished you get that for free.