



PHOTOGRAPHS BY FARZANA CONTRACTOR

Birds eye view of Queenstown.

SHAHINA KARA

Over The Top

FARZANA CONTRACTOR indulges herself in a 'heli picnic' ... champagne on an isolated peak after a helicopter ride followed by an impromptu visit to a celebrity hiding in the hills!

It did not surprise me when I learned that among the many diverse activities one could indulge in at Queenstown was, 'a heli picnic'. When you have such beauty around it would be a shame not to think of such tourism ideas.

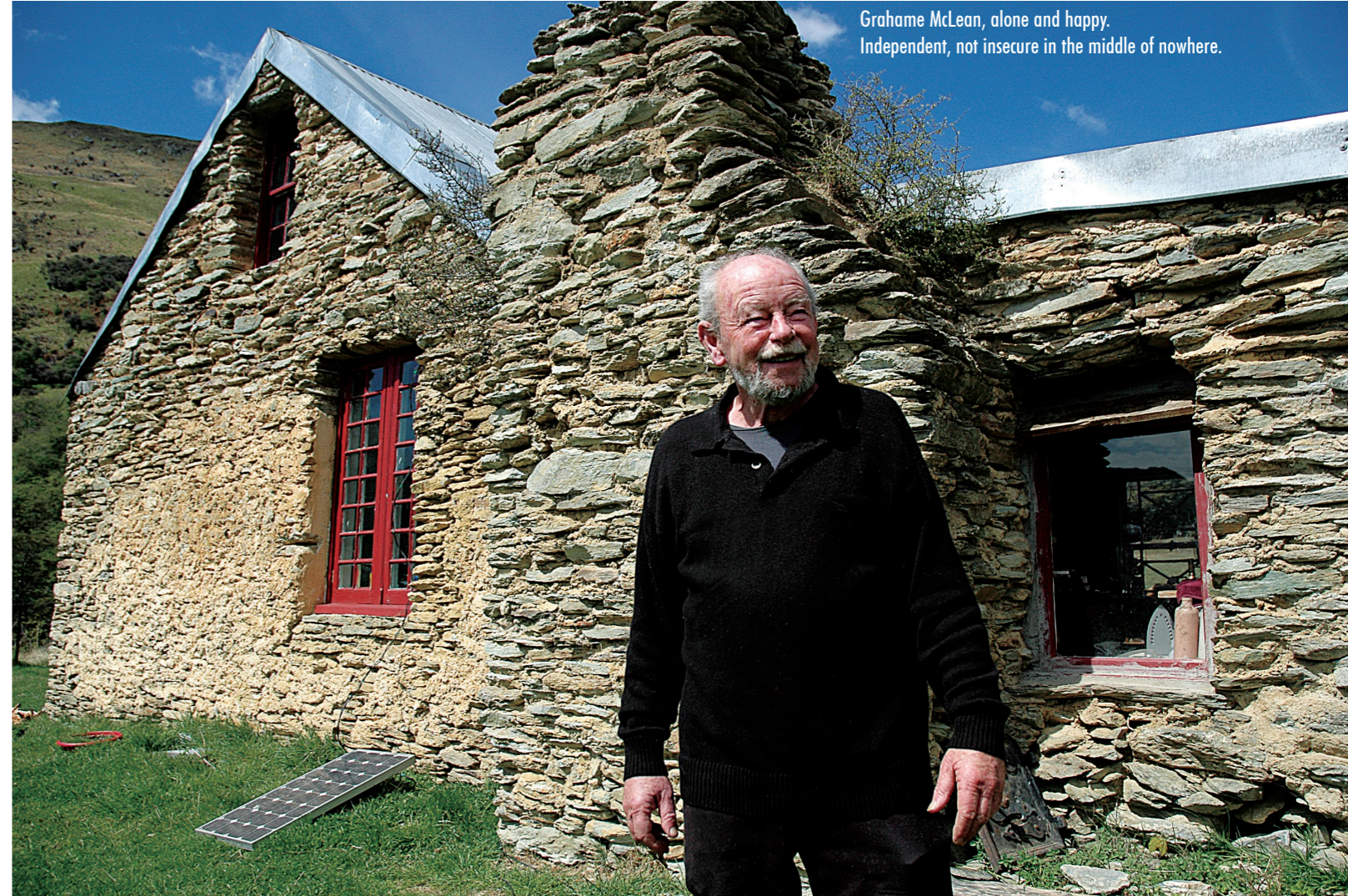
So what they do is pick you up in a helicopter and take you to a selected peak (Cecil, in my case), gently land at a safe location, the dashing pilot then gets out and charmingly helps you out, yanks a picnic hamper and leads you to a point where you get the most awesome view of the stunning ➤



land and waterscape. While you are oohing and aahing, clicking pictures, and rubbing your hands to warm yourself — for it is very cold and breezy up there, he is busying himself with popping open the chilled bottle of Champagne. And even before you weigh the pros and cons of the situation, you are sipping from crystal flutes, laughing, celebrating the good life, thanking God for your lot.

Very interesting, this helicopter ride. But what gave a twist to my little heli trip was a stray chat with the pilot, who I learned had an errand to run for someone who lived in the hills beyond. He enquired if I would mind if we called on him. Mind? I'd love the extra mile! So there we were on our way, cutting air to see the man in the hills.

And wow, was that an experience! Turned out, 'Mr Hills' was a well ➤



Grahame McLean, alone and happy. Independent, not insecure in the middle of nowhere.



All that Grahame McLean needs...



known New Zealand film producer and director, Grahame McLean, who had given up normal life to go settle down in the middle of nowhere, all by himself, with just sheep and cow for company, the nearest neighbour a 100,000 acres away. This was unbelievable stuff.

Never thought I would sit doing an impromptu interview with a celeb who gave it all up to do what his heart wanted him to. So as it happens, Mc Lean who lived in Wellington, grew up climbing hills and got involved with films because he is a romantic. He made films like Lizzie, Lie of the Land, ➤





At your majesty's service!



Naomi Mentiplay of Tourism New Zealand says "cheers".



Craggy hills and champagne with the pilot.



The famous tussock and 'vegetable sheep' of New Zealand.

Should I Be Good, and was involved in Sleeping Dogs, Beyond Reasonable Doubt, Songs For The Return Home.

He came to this spot on horse back some 30 years ago, with metal detectors, searching for metal (gold). In the 1880s, he says, people lived here. He found many bottles buried around. At some point he bought the 54 acres of land and visited it once a year. Then two years ago he shifted here permanently.

And how does he manage? Pretty well, is the answer. There is obviously no electricity. But very ingeniously he uses car batteries which he charges with the help of a solar panel.

Inside the quaint stone house he has a room with a bed, a kitchen and a sitting room which has nothing but a chair and a large desk cluttered with odd things. In the kitchen he uses wood fire and charcoal. And the old black kettle I saw would, if it could, have its own tale to tell. In a small glass case with assorted dry foods I also noticed some porcini

mushrooms.

But how about groceries? Well, he has a daughter, who comes along sometimes. She brings them to him from time to time. And what does he ask for? Oh, Turkey, Ham, Pate, Olives, Relish, Cheese... Hmm, not bad.

Grahame Mc Lean used to wake at daybreak, but now sleeps for 12 hours, he chops wood, cooks, walks to ease pain. Surprisingly, he eats dinner at 10 p.m. Late by mountain standards, I'd think. When it was time to say 'au revoir', he inquired with a glint in his eye, if I didn't need a nice old man to take care of me! Well it was proved that neither high altitude, nor solitude affects your sense of humour. And that John Donne wasn't entirely right when he said, "No man is an island". Some are and voluntarily.

OVER THE TOP
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