

knucklebones



sam hunt  
knucklebones

POEMS 1962–2012

craig potton publishing

Published in 2012 by Craig Potton Publishing

Craig Potton Publishing  
98 Vickerman Street, PO Box 555, Nelson, New Zealand  
[www.craigpotton.co.nz](http://www.craigpotton.co.nz)

Poems © Sam Hunt

ISBN 978-1-877517-71-6

Printed in China by Everbest Printing Ltd

This book is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced by any process without the permission of the publishers.

# CONTENTS

Christmas 1953 .....	14
----------------------	----

## PREFACE

### BRACKEN COUNTRY

Beware the man .....	18
Walking the morning city .....	19
Post Office report .....	20
A house north near mangroves .....	21
August steam .....	22
A wind of wolves .....	23
Collision .....	24
A Mangaweka road song .....	25
School policy on stickmen .....	26
Bracken country .....	27

### FROM BOTTLE CREEK

We could just disappear .....	30
Letter home .....	31
Flutemaker .....	32
My white ship .....	33
Homecoming .....	34
Invocation in Equinox .....	36
Singing for you now .....	37
Plea before storm .....	38
At Castor Bay .....	39
A white gentian .....	40
A song about her .....	41

July 21 1969 .....	42
Somewhere near here; many miles .....	43
Porirua Friday night .....	44
A summer poem .....	45
A Bottle Creek blues .....	46
A hot-water bottle baby blues .....	47
My father scything .....	48
Return in spring .....	49
Postcard of a cabbage tree .....	50
Before the demolitions .....	52
Smash .....	53
Her words on leaving .....	54
A school report .....	55
Saturday Palm Sunday .....	56
A valley called Moonshine .....	57
Four bow-bow poems .....	58
A purple balloon .....	60
Photograph of Robin in war-paint .....	62

## SOUTH INTO WINTER

The windows of our morning .....	66
A long time .....	67
Himatangi .....	68
Stabat Mater .....	69
Early opener .....	70
Notes from a journey .....	72
Just like that! .....	73
Modigliani girl .....	74
Lyn .....	75
Four cobweb poems .....	76

Road song Paekakariki .....	78
After sickness .....	80

## TIME TO RIDE

Time to ride .....	84
Your ultimate accountant .....	85
Black cattle at dawn, Waiura .....	86
Christina .....	88
You house the moon .....	89
Maintrunk country road song .....	90
Every time it rains like this .....	91
Of Dan and the Peacock .....	92

## DRUNKARD'S GARDEN

Drunkard's garden .....	96
Friend to many .....	97
Two winter settings .....	98
Ana gathering cones on Battle Hill .....	99
Girl with black eye in grocer's shop .....	100
Words on a first waking .....	101
Four songs .....	102
Those eyes; such mist .....	104
No Exit .....	105
Birth of a son .....	106
Wagoning, up Moonshine .....	107
Baptism by river water .....	108
For Kristin and Tom on a stormy morning ...	109
The men of Moonshine .....	110
My father today .....	111

Liz .....	112
Up Battle Hill .....	113

### COLLECTED POEMS

Rainbows, and a promise of snow .....	116
Hilary .....	118
Four Manly verses .....	120
Salt man .....	121
Sailor's morning .....	122
Return to Drunken Bay .....	124
Return to Rangitoto .....	125
Song for Tom .....	126
West Coast woman .....	127
Death of the poet preacherman .....	128
April Fool .....	129
River woman songs .....	130
Requiem .....	132

### RUNNING SCARED

Running scared .....	136
After separation .....	138
Beyond the brink .....	140
Words for Tina .....	141
Brother Lynch .....	142
Passing through .....	145
Returned Serviceman .....	146
Ancient taupata, Bottle Creek .....	148
Death in the street .....	150
Bottle to Battle to Death .....	152
Dead bird .....	154
New words .....	157



## APPROACHES TO PAREMATA

October in the bay .....	160
Patea 1983 .....	162
Arthur Allan Thomas .....	164
Wedding party and after .....	165
Six summer sestets .....	166
Lisa from Manjimup .....	168
Wave song .....	169

## SELECTED POEMS

We are nearly neighbours .....	172
Waikato river song .....	173
Glimpse .....	174
Hitting 40 .....	175

## ANGEL GEAR

I wonder what the old man is thinking? .....	178
Foreign hotel .....	179
Making tracks .....	180
Spider song .....	182
The man on the sandtrack said .....	183
Tora wind song .....	184
What dandelions think .....	185
Yellow .....	186
Bone flute .....	187
September 1st .....	188
Clearing the ashes out .....	190
Oterei rivermouth .....	191
Catching the tide .....	192
Not in this weather .....	193

Rangitaiki road song .....	194
Four plateau songs .....	196
Sara .....	198

## MAKING TRACKS

Coming to it .....	202
Seven years .....	203
It's rain today in Sydney .....	204
After words .....	205
That feeling-of-being-in-the-country .....	206
War history .....	207
Rangitikei river song .....	208

## DOWN THE BACKBONE

A new plateau song .....	212
Why a man .....	213
Fire, as always .....	214
Old flames .....	215
Hey, Minstrel .....	216
Working the Genesis week .....	218
Making it back in .....	219
Harpooner's song .....	220
Floating poem .....	222
Fucking poem .....	223
There isn't a river .....	224
That's it .....	225
Naming the Gods .....	226

## DOUBTLESS

Doubtless .....	230
Arapaoa .....	249

Tree poem .....	250
He was one of the last .....	251
Normal enough .....	252
Missing you .....	254
Snap/shot .....	256
As we speak .....	257
Whose turn is it? .....	258
Poem on Meg's death .....	259
I throw you flowers .....	260
Patron Saint song .....	261
Sunset song .....	262
No bells .....	264
What takes your fancy .....	266
Cloud song .....	267
Jimmy Vernon .....	268
Better than this? .....	269
Sonata .....	270
Lugging the sack .....	272
Lines for a New Year .....	274
Talking of the weather .....	280

## CHORDS

Chord 1 .....	284
Chord 2 .....	285
Chord 3 .....	286
Chord 4 .....	286
Chord 5 .....	287
Chord 6 .....	287
Chord 7 .....	288
Chord 8 .....	289
Chord 9 .....	290

Janáček chord .....	291
Chord 11 .....	292
Chord 12 .....	294
Chord 13 .....	295
Chord 14 .....	296
Chord 15 .....	297
Chord 16 .....	298
Chord 17 .....	300
Chord 18 .....	301
Boathouse chord .....	302
Chord 20 .....	303
Chord 21 .....	303
Chord 22 .....	304
Chord 23 .....	305
Chord 24 .....	306
Chord 25 .....	307
Chord 26 .....	308
Chord 27 .....	309
Chord 28 .....	310
Chord 29 .....	311
Chord 30 .....	312
Chord 31 .....	313
Chord 32 .....	314
Chord 33 .....	315
Chord 34 .....	316
Tokatoka chord .....	317
Chord 36 .....	318
Chord 37 .....	320
Chord 38 .....	321
Chord 39 .....	322
Chord 40 .....	323

Chord 41 .....	324
Chord 42 .....	325
All weathers chord .....	326
Raupo chord .....	327
The Loki chords .....	330
Rain! but not enough .....	332
A long summer .....	333
Blessed the fruit .....	334
Blackbird song .....	336
11 Runes (for Alf, turning 11) .....	337
It was the old story .....	340
Diana .....	341
It's all okay .....	342
Move on song .....	344
Not these days .....	345
They are clouds .....	346
To a sparrow .....	347
To be a house .....	348
Looking for the lights .....	350
Death notices .....	351
Last in line .....	352

## KNUCKLEBONES

Five knucklebones .....	356
-------------------------	-----

*Christmas 1953*

Climb up the cliff path to  
the pines where through  
their needles salt winds blow

and far below  
the fish and ocean go

and down the cliff path home  
bring a lone  
Christmas tree

and by the beach  
let it in warm winds grow.

(Sam Hunt, age 7)

## PREFACE

*Knucklebones* is a collection of poems selected from all Sam Hunt's published work. While this book begins with poems from *Bracken Country*, his first collection published in 1971, this collection actually spans 50 years of writing, as the earliest poem in this collection was written in 1962, before concluding with poems written in 2012. The only one of Sam's books not drawn from in *Knucklebones* is the autobiographical *Backroads: Charting a Poet's Life* (Craig Potton Publishing, 2009).

A chronological outlier in this collection is *Christmas 1953*, the poem facing this preface. While Sam has always remembered this poem (his recall for thousands of poems is legendary), it was not until after his mother's death, while sorting through her papers, that he found a definitive hard copy. It was written at his childhood home at Milford Beach on the North Shore of Auckland, at the age of seven. The poems have not stopped since.





# BRACKEN COUNTRY

1971

*Beware the man*

Beware the man who tries to fit you out  
In his idea of a hat  
Dictating the colour and the shape of it.

He takes your head and carefully measures it  
Says 'Of course black's out'.  
He sees himself in the big black hat.

So you may be a member of the act  
He makes for you your special coloured hat.  
Beware! He's fitting you for more than that.

*Walking the morning city*

Walking the morning city  
the opposite direction  
workers walking toward me  
walking from the sun:  
I have no job to go to  
so walk into the station

watch the all-night Limited  
pull in at the platform  
pretend I'm waiting for  
a friend who never came:  
pretend I'm disappointed  
vamp my blues harmonica

buy a lightweight pad  
and biro at the station store  
coffee at the cafeteria  
pretend to write a letter:  
have no one to write to  
so drink a cup and leave

walk down morning streets  
lightweight in the sun  
no one to tell this to  
'cause no one is my lover.  
This morning more than ever  
I'm set on finding you.

## *Post Office report*

'No space for human error,'  
the postmaster tells me,  
'they're a team my workers here.'

Morning tea-break I meet the team:  
efficient, incredibly  
ugly every one of them.

Understaffed? in need maybe  
of extra office space? I suggest  
an arm-chair for pension day.

My report goes on, every  
date-stamp initialled and timed –  
surprised I'm not asked to stay!

'We're running an office here,'  
he tells me, 'not a home' –  
looking to his nodding team.

My report is official,  
complete by noon. But I stay, all  
day: they think I'll never go.

I won't. I'm waiting for the one  
human error these P.O.  
workers never counted on.

*A house north near mangroves*

You rarely see your face at  
moments now that matter much.  
It's when, say, shaving – and that's  
once in a month at a stretch;  
or tying a tie, adjusting  
the noose for easy breathing.

How many, hearing the news  
their grandfather died last night  
in a house north near mangroves –  
too far from where you are right  
then at the moment you're told;  
too late – how many have held  
their face to a mirror that  
moment? watched it in the wide  
mirror above the driver's seat.

Instead of school as usual,  
you are dressed up one morning,  
bundled with fat sacks of mail  
aboard a bus with your mother.  
After you're sick of watching  
cows watching each other,  
you ask her *Where are we going?*  
'Your grandfather. He died last  
night.' And watch your mouth twist

to a great big question-mark.  
You try twisting it further  
over the driver's shoulder  
till it makes you laugh. You ask  
her again and keep watching  
your face. *Mum where are we going?*

*August steam*

The lake made no sense early on:  
driving down a slipway straight  
two truant kids in a big V8  
parking in a rain storm  
huddled in beside the lake.

It made no sense then early on:  
it wasn't till much later  
we understood things better  
nothing could go wrong –  
you said let's drive forever.

We could only return:  
the sulphur city drenched  
steaming after rain: so ditched  
the faithful love machine  
made in for a dressing shed.

Undressed each other in turn:  
I never thought I'd ever  
be your winter hot-pool lover  
until I was right then.  
Some things are never over.

*A wind of wolves*

The first page of *Zhivago*  
the boy is on a mound of clay  
beside his mother's grave.  
My friend's funeral today,

already rain  
at 5 a.m. An upstairs guest,  
I hear a wind of wolves,  
no flowers by request.

*Collision*

I took the punch like glass.  
I didn't break, I shattered.  
A car smash once, head on.

One day I started reading poems  
where people said they looked out  
crying through their tears –

I believe in all these things –  
like looking at you dead  
through shattered glass.



*A Mangaweka road song*

No place more I'd like to bring you than  
this one-pub town  
approached in low gear down  
the gorges through the hills.

Now they've built the by-pass  
the drinkers left are locals  
and odd commercial travellers.  
Quiet afternoons like this you hear the falls.

On the Post Office corner  
a blue flag floats. I bought  
a hot meat pie at the store,  
a new harmonica.

A public bar drinker  
tells me what I want to hear.  
I play for him later  
songs on my harmonica.

We know each other now.  
I buy my round of beers,  
I catch up on the news  
in small town public bars.

They ask me why I travel  
and never settle down.  
I lose two games of pool  
and hitch-hike out of town.

*School policy on stickmen*

It's said that children should not use  
stick figures when they draw.  
And yet I've lain all night awake  
looking at this drawing here  
of orange men, stick figures every one of them,  
walking up a crayon mountain hand in hand  
walking up my wall.

They're edging up a ridge  
their backs against the mountain  
pinned against my wall.  
And every one is smiling.  
They know the way a mountain laughs,  
especially crayon mountains made of brown.  
They know they're not allowed,  
these orange men.

*Bracken country*

Walk the wagon line  
Embankments either side,  
A half full flagon, harsh dry wine,  
Underneath your arm.

The folks back home  
Call you by your name.  
Walk, son, drink, speak well of every  
Single one of them.