

## NEW ZEALAND NOTES, 1954-5

By DAVID HALL

**T**HE last climbing season was notable for two things: first, the early disappearance of snow providing in early January conditions which might have been expected six weeks later; second, the high death roll in accidents.

A consequence of the lack of snow was that much rock was exposed which would have been concealed at a normal Christmas season and many slopes were uncompromisingly hard ice which would normally have been steep, firm snow; everyone in fact had to work fairly hard for the climbs they did. But some very good climbs were done.

The existence (or should one say the 'invention') of new ten-thousanders must be a perpetual menace to the peace of mind of those few choice spirits who have achieved what they hoped was an unfading garland with the ascent of all the peaks in New Zealand over 10,000 ft. However, Mount 'Magellan' is not positively claimed as definitely 10,000 ft., although it must closely approximate to it. (Throughout these notes names cited in inverted commas have yet to receive the approval of the Geographic Board.) 'Magellan' lies on the Balfour Range spur of Mount Teichelmann, and its first ascent was made in February by Guide Harry Ayres with B. S. Gillies and Sir Edmund Hillary and D. G. Herron; the two parties climbed some of the day on one rope. They left the Haast Hut at 2 A.M., were at the summit of Teichelmann by way of Clarke Saddle by 10.45 A.M., reached their objective, after traversing a long teetery crest of snow interrupted by a formidable rock tower, at 4 P.M., and returned to the Haast Hut by the route of ascent twenty-four hours after setting forth.

The other first ascents of the season were made mostly in the far south, among the steep-sided, rocky mountains of the Sounds district which is the favourite stamping ground of a group of accomplished Southland climbers. In December a Barrier Range virgin (Mount 'Sabre') was climbed by G. Hall-Jones, W. I. Gordon, D. Ryan and B. L. Wood from the Homer Forks Hut. In January L. E. Warburton, G. Hall-Jones and D. B. Wilson climbed the 6,400 ft. Mount 'Cirque' from the Cleddau River, reaching it over Mount Gulliver, itself a second ascent. Two weeks later the same party, with W. I. Gordon added, used a variation of the same route to make a first ascent of a neighbour on the other side of Gulliver, Mount 'Access.' In March, W. I. Gordon and R. W. Blee made the first ascent of Mount 'Triangle' (about 6,500 ft.) from Mistake Creek, an Eglinton Valley tributary. On Easter Sunday, G. Hall-Jones and M. J. Imlay climbed a 6,300-foot virgin between Mount 'Apirana' and The Twins.

In the Sounds area, too, the veteran Edgar R. Williams (with A. Deans, M. Bassett and R. Copp) in the course of a November-December visit

made the first ascent of Llawrenny Peaks overlooking Milford Sound and also climbed Terror Peak. In February Mount Phillips was first climbed by D. E. Cooper and T. Barfoot from the Sinbad Gully and the same party made an ascent of Mitre Peak. In January the Canterbury Museum Expedition exploring further south in the Sounds country made the first ascent of Coronation Peak (about 6,000 ft.). In the same area West of Lake Manapouri Mr. and Mrs. A. M. Cookson, G. T. S. Baylis and P. J. Brook climbed the virgin Mount Soaker (about 6,100 ft.) after a lengthy quest for a route.

In the Wataroa in January, Margaret Leete, H. Beckett and I. Jeffery, in spite of bad weather, climbed to a virgin summit in the Butler Range from Hughes Creek.

Some of the new routes achieved were of a particularly high standard. The ascent of the South-west ridge of Nazomi by H. MacInnes, a Scots visitor, and P. Robinson, a Fulbright scholarship-holder from the U.S.A., was possibly the most continuously difficult rock-climbing ever undertaken in this country. They left the Hooker Hut (in February) at 2 P.M., equipped with sleeping bags as well as pitons, reached the top of the ridge twenty-four hours later (they did not continue to the actual summit of Nazomi) and returned to their base by the route of ascent by the next afternoon—a little over forty-eight hours out. Robinson also climbed Tasman (with B. Gunn) and made alone the third ascent of Mount Conrad (8,551 ft.) in the Murchison; he had made in British Columbia the second and third ascents of its Mount Conrad, another of the conquests of Conrad Kain. In December MacInnes had climbed Mitre Peak alone.

A high night-out record was put up also by one of the parties assaulting the virgin North-east ridge of Mount Aspiring. L. T. Bruce, I. Bagley, R. E. C. Scott and B. J. Wilkins left their Therma Glacier snow cave at 7.30 A.M. on New Year's Day, climbed high on the ridge (which joins the top of the Coxcomb Ridge) and were then obliged to shelter for two nights of storm at 9,600 ft. in a small ice cave. On January 4 they were overtaken on the same route near the summit by R. Tornquist and J. D. Rockell (who reached the top first at 6 P.M.) whose companions, I. T. Pickens and J. A. Rattenbury, with Bruce's party, did not arrive on top in time to avoid a night out descending the North-west Ridge.

Tornquist's party belonged to the camp organised in the Matukituki Valley by the Auckland Section of the New Zealand Alpine Club whose 60-odd members climbed Aspiring (another party ascended it by the ordinary route) and made many ascents of French, Bevan, Liverpool, Islington and Plunket Dome, and also climbed Barff, Tyndall and Ansted. In January an independent party, D. W. Smellie, a Canadian, and J. Hammond, an Englishman, made the third ascent of the Coxcomb Ridge of Aspiring in the fast time of sixteen hours out and back from the French Ridge bivouac. The same pair had climbed Mounts Apirana, Talbot and Macpherson in the Sounds and were to climb Tasman. Hammond later lost his life in the Hooker.

In the Matukituki area in December P. S. Powell and F. Cooper made the first traverse of Rob Roy.

In January H. P. Barcham and B. H. Waterhouse made a new route of considerable interest and difficulty from the Hooker to the summit of Dampier. They left the Empress Hut at 2 A.M. and followed the rib on the west side of Fyfe's Couloir until steep hard ice slopes led them to the Main Divide and to the peak at 1.15 P.M. They returned by the same route at 8.30 P.M.

The three peaks of Mount Haast received a good deal of attention. Two Swiss now living in New Zealand, T. Sidler and H. Bohny, early in January made the first traverse of all three peaks. They made use of ski to approach the peak from Pioneer Hut and completed the expedition in about twelve hours. In January also L. R. Hewitt, Mrs. M. M. Davidson and A. F. Reid made the first ascent of Haast from near Pioneer Pass. They traversed on to Lendenfeld before returning. On the same day as the Swiss climbed Haast, H. McCallum and P. C. Gardner reached the Main Divide up the very steep eastern approach to Marcel Col from the Grand Plateau and then climbed Haast; they descended to the west and trudged back to the Haast Hut over Lendenfeld Saddle.

The Southlanders made a number of enterprising new routes. In January, G. Hall-Jones, W. I. Gordon and R. D. Miller made the first ascent from Lake Marion of Mount Christina (8,210 ft.); and in February, Mount Crosscut (7,700) was also ascended from Lake Marion by Hall-Jones, Warburton and D. B. Wilson. The first ascent from Cirque Creek of Crosscut and its first traverse were also accomplished in February by R. W. Blee, Gordon and Miller.

Fewer parties than usual embraced the rigours of trans-alpine crossings. In early January a Wellington party (A. J. Heine, L. I. Hart, J. Randle and B. Hearfield) from a snow cave on the Garden of Eden (the ice plateau at the head of the Rangitata) climbed Mount Kensington (8,150), Guardian Peak (7,500), and Tyndall (8,260), before adventuring down into the Barlow and over the intervening ridge to the Poerua River, whence they made their way out to the West Coast following the Wilberg Range.

In December-January, L. R. Hewitt, Mrs. M. M. Davidson, C. S. Brockett and A. P. Thomson visited the Lawrence and climbed Couloir Peak and Arrowsmith. The two latter made a strenuous attempt on Red Peak, previously unassailed from the Lawrence side, and won a moral victory being defeated only by the final schrund and time.

Every year it is increasingly difficult to provide an account of the season's whole activities within reasonable compass. Many parties were active in the Hermitage area, and the Fox Glacier peaks were particularly well patronised. Parties also visited the Godley, the Wilkin and the Hunter Valleys. Mount Brewster was climbed from the Haast River by Dr. R. Rodda and R. R. Edwards. One of the most interesting developments of the post-war years has been the numbers of overseas visitors coming here.

Unfortunately, the visitors contributed heavily to this year's death roll. Their being strangers here is probably not in itself in anyway significant in this connection; the disturbing feature of this season's accidents was that they often involved experienced climbers. In January, a rope of three, J. F. Foster, E. G. McKay and B. C. Moss, lost their lives on the western flanks of Sefton in unexplained circumstances. Equally unaccounted for was the loss in late January in the Hooker on the Low Peak of Mount Cook of J. E. Young, J. Hammond, and J. J. Vidulich, the two former Englishmen, the latter an Australian. In February another party, both Australians recently settled in New Zealand, fell descending the Low Peak of Cook: F. C. Cooper was killed, and his companion, J. Murphy, although injured, regained the Empress Hut and used its radio to summon help. In early January the Auckland Section camp in the Matukituki was saddened by the death of Miss Y. Robinson who slipped on steep, wet snowgrass in the Cascade Basin; no accepted technique seems yet to have been evolved for dealing with this treacherous terrain.

Two other deaths have left us much poorer. Arthur P. Harper has died; he will be adequately noticed elsewhere in these pages. Colin Todd, one of the most vigorous of the younger group of climbers, who had just won distinction in the Himalayas, was killed in a motor-bicycle accident near his home in Dunedin. He had shown great promise in his own field of biochemistry. No one epitomised the eagerness and zest for life of his generation better than Colin Todd lecturing to us about his recent experiences in the Himalaya.