

NEW ZEALAND NOTES, 1956-7

BY DAVID HALL

THIS has been one of our less rewarding seasons. The weather was especially uncooperative at the time (Christmas-New Year) when the maximum number of people go into the mountains. In spite of this some climbs of high standard were made, and it is possible to see the higher standards of technique of recent years being maintained.

Mount Cook was climbed several times. The High Peak was reached five times by the Linda route, and once in the course of a Grand Traverse. (A party also made a nearly complete ascent by Zurbriggen's route.). Apart from the traverse, the Middle Peak was climbed independently from the Hooker side. Three parties climbed the Low Peak.

Tasman was climbed eight times. One of the parties ascending by the Syme Ridge descended by the Silberhorn. Of the parties which climbed it by the Silberhorn two came over Teichelmann from snow caves in the Balfour névé. Tasman was climbed also from the west over Lendenfeld.

Four parties climbed Malte Brun, four Elie de Beaumont (including two traverses to the West Peak), four Glacier Peak, two Douglas, one each Torres and La Pérouse. Even this season still had something to offer the patient, the enterprising or the lucky.

Two separate parties established snow cave bases in the Balfour at over 9,000 ft., an altitude which permitted a gentlemanly breakfast time before assaulting some of our highest mountains. The first party (E. R. B. Graham, G. E. Hasell and T. A. Nuttall) in January made the first ascent of Drake, a neighbour of the recently climbed Magellan, and had to use pitons on steep, hard ice. Another day they skirted under Vancouver on new ground to reach the Hicks-Dampier ridge and used it to climb Dampier; they afterwards climbed Hicks. They made the second ascent of Magellan by a new, difficult route, returning over Teichelmann which they again made a thoroughfare on their ascent of Tasman. They also climbed Vancouver by a new route and took in Malaspina (whose exact location seems to have become a little uncertain) on the way down. They went out over Clarke Saddle to the Hermitage. This record is the more remarkable because they were often troubled by high winds and bad conditions generally, which forced the abandonment of several climbs.

The second party to make a base in the Balfour also came in up the Cook River from the west. This consisted of J. G. Wilson, M. R. White, B. L. Smith and D. J. Elphick, who had their most hair-raising moments before they trod the snow. Smith was crossing the wire 'cage' at Craig Creek, when the cable parted; he was extraordinarily lucky to be pitched into water about 4 ft. deep (enough to break his fall but not to drown him) and waded ashore with the flattened frame of his pack the only damage. They spent thirteen February nights in their snow cave and climbed Teichelmann, Drake (second ascent, by a varied route), Magellan (third ascent), a snow dome west of Vancouver (a first ascent undertaken largely for reconnaissance purposes) and Tasman by the Silberhorn route. Their best climb was a difficult new route completed by Smith and Elphick on Hicks, involving a ten-hour ascent, a night out on the summit in worsening weather, and a nightmare descent next day by the route of ascent, whose rocks were now ice-covered. They, too, went out to the Hermitage.

In February also E. R. B. Graham and D. J. Heraud traversed all the peaks of Haast (the second complete traverse), spending a night out in the process. Their route varied that of their predecessors at several points.

In December J. B. Butchers, J. G. Mathews and F. J. Austin made the first ascent from the Murchison side of Point 9,144 ft. in the Malte Brun range, descending by Tasman Saddle. Most of the difficulties lay on loose rock.

A party (J. T. Cruse, N. J. Mitchell and W. Nixon) in December made the second complete ascent of Mt. Lucia in the Liebig range, using a new route. They later climbed Mt. Hutton and crossed to the Murchison.

At Easter an advanced climbing course was held at the Canterbury Mountaineering Club's hut in the Cameron Valley, under Arrowsmith. It included sixteen persons and examined such recondite matters as the use of ice pitons (rock pitons being now almost commonplace), and interesting ways of pulling people out of crevasses. In spite of some slight confusion as to who was teacher and who pupil (many of our most resolute and accomplished climbers were there), the course was a marked success; bad weather gave ample time for theory to receive its due. Course members did incidentally manage to climb Prop, Marquee, Tent, Couloir and—twice—Arrowsmith.

There were three ascents of Aspiring. Diligent research by members of the Otago section of the New Zealand Alpine Club has resulted in the establishment of a new, safer route between the Matukituki and Dart Valleys. The Ernie Smith route, although an improvement on earlier routes, had been the scene of accidents due to travellers, almost inevitably heavily laden, slipping on steep snow-grass slopes, possibly

our most dangerous terrain and one often blithely embarked on by the inexperienced.

In the Darrans there were still new peaks and new routes waiting the pleasure of energetic Southlanders, who are near enough to their mountains to climb at weekends. In October W. I. Gordon and R. W. Blee made a new route on Students' Peak. Gordon and R. D. Miller next day climbed Mt. Moir by the ridge from Homer Saddle, another new route. In February Miller, with W. R. Wood and L. E. Warburton, made the first ascent of the South-west face of Mt. Talbot. In March Miller and Blee made another new route on Talbot by climbing the rocky East buttress.

In February Blee and G. Hall-Jones made the first ascent of Mt. Ada from the West Cleddau.

Late in the 1957 season P. Houghton and M. Gill made the first ascent of the unnamed, block-shaped peak, about 7,300 ft., south of Milne. The next day they re-ascended this feature and gained access over it to a gulch which ultimately led out to the Hollyford.

In December B. J. Wilkins and R. E. Wareing finally completed the first ascent of Castle Mount (6,872 ft.), overlooking the Clinton River. In 1955 Wilkins had been rebuffed when he attempted its direct assault by the cliffs whose intermittent vegetation provided both obstacles and insecure pitonage. With vivid memories of this route, Wilkins made an attempt from McKinnon Pass over Mt. Hart and its unnamed neighbour, only to be forced back to his original route for the third, and successful, attempt.

In January a party (A. M. Cookson, Mr. and Mrs. N. D. Hardie, J. Maher and Miss M. Simpson) explored the area between Malaspina (or Smith) Sound and Bradshaw Sound, chiefly following the main watershed ridge at between 3,000 and 5,000 ft. They entered the area by walking through from Lake Manapouri to Doubtful Sound; their return was made by the North Arm, Manapouri.

Mountaineering members of the New Zealand Antarctic parties have done some climbs. A. J. Heine, B. M. Gunn and G. Warren, exploring the Skelton Glacier, primarily with geological aims, in February climbed a snow peak which they named Ant Hill. Its chief value was the view provided of Mount Harmsworth (over 10,000 ft. and some 9,000 ft. above the Glacier). A few days later they made its first ascent, taking eighteen hours to the top by way of a steep ridge studded with granite towers. They regained their camp after twenty-six hours of nearly continuous climbing, some of it in an icy wind and much of it difficult and exposed.

In 1953 the government set up a National Parks Authority to administer our parks, all of considerable natural beauty and embracing incidentally many mountainous areas. The Authority has the assistance

in some areas of Boards representing various interests—Tongariro, Arthur's Pass and Mount Cook are the Boards of most concern to climbers. It is satisfactory to note in passing that mountaineering interests are well represented on both the Authority and the existing Boards, both officially and by those gratifying coincidences which bolster faith in the wisdom of democratic processes. Some parks are still not administered by Boards: a welcome move has been made to set one up to administer the Fiordland Park, an area of prime interest to climbers. The Authority and the Boards are doing good work (the Mount Cook Board, for instance, is taking over the employment of the Hermitage guides), and one can only hope that a government which has had the wit to set up the necessary legislative machinery for the proper administration of the National Parks will also bring itself to provide the money for the job to be done well.

An increasing number of people resident in Australia (many of New Zealand origin) are making a habit of visiting our mountains. It is a recognition of their interest that an Australian section of the New Zealand Alpine Club has now been formed with headquarters in Sydney. That city and Canberra (with its university and governmental populations) are apparently where most of the members of the new section live.

The appearance of John Pascoe's edition of the papers of Charles Douglas does justice, forty years after his death, to a remarkable character. Douglas professed to despise 'Alpine lunatics', though he hazarded himself over and over again in just as wanton and irrational a fashion, admittedly usually at somewhat lower altitudes. He did most of the intimate exploration of the savage mountain valleys of South Westland, was the mentor of A. P. Harper as an explorer and expressed a wry philosophy in letters and diaries which vividly reveal his stoical, self-sufficient and iconoclastic personality in Pascoe's book, *Mr. Explorer Douglas*.

The death of Alec Graham will be widely regretted. Both he and Peter Graham had been giving some thought in recent years to recording their impressions and memories, and it is to be hoped that we might one day see a book appear which would be of something like the quality of their services.

Some Christchurch members of the Alpine Club arranged a dinner in May to celebrate the Centenary. This was attended by seven of the twenty-odd members scattered through New Zealand; two more members would have been present but for the last-minute collapse of their transport arrangements.