

A FIRST VISIT TO THE NEW ZEALAND ALPS

BY T. A. H. PEACOCKE

(Four illustrations: nos. 58-61)

WHEN the Editor invited me to record my impressions of the New Zealand Alps I was in some doubt about a suitable title. 'A first visit' might imply that I hoped to make more visits and such hopes at the age of fifty-nine seemed to be tempting providence. Perhaps 'a last visit' would be a more appropriate title, but a last visit must have had a precursor, so I really had no alternative but the present title.

I first felt the urge to climb in the Antipodes as a result of hearing a lecture by H. E. L. Porter at Oxford nearly forty years ago. Circumstances made the realisation impossible, but the flame of desire was fanned afresh as a result of climbing in the Swiss Alps with Dr. Roland Rodda, A.C., who was visiting this country from New Zealand in 1959 and joined the A.C. meet. He advised me not to postpone my plan too long, but seven more years had to pass before the schoolmaster's gift from the gods arrived, the sabbatical term. Much reading of the *A. J.* helped me to form a picture of the New Zealand mountains and, to cut a long story short, my wife and I arrived in Wellington on January 7, 1967. Without much delay we flew on to Christchurch, as luck would have it in an old Dakota, which travelled at a gentlemanly speed and low enough for us to see something of the Kaikouras. The Kaikouras are a fine range of mountains in the north-eastern part of the South Island.

On reaching Christchurch one of our many friends offered us the loan of his Ford V-8. This magnificent gesture was typical. A slight hitch occurred when I discovered that I had left my driving licence in England, but some frantic telephoning soon produced it. Next we were offered the loan of a 'batch', i.e. a holiday cottage, near Arthur's Pass, and this seemed a very suitable area in which to get into training before starting serious climbing in the Mount Cook area. Arthur's Pass is a gap in the main divide, a little over 3000 ft. high and about fifty miles south of the Lewis Pass, which is the northern end of the Southern Alps. A motor road and a railway cross Arthur's Pass and link Christchurch with Greymouth in Westland.

I had planned to spend a good three weeks in the Mount Cook National Park area starting about the beginning of February, as February was reported to be the best month for weather. Almost all

the 10,000 ft. peaks are within the confines of the Park. A 10,000 ft. peak in New Zealand is roughly equivalent to a 4000 m. peak in the Alps, since the glaciers come much lower and so does the snow line. The Tasman glacier is twenty miles long, one and a half miles wide, and reported to be over 2000 ft. thick in the upper part. Its snout is at 3000 ft. On the western side of the divide the Fox and Franz Josef glaciers descend to about 1000 ft. above sea level. Most of the glaciers are retreating, but the Fox and Franz Josef have recently made a considerable advance. The New Zealand glaciers are much more active than the Swiss glaciers. The Tasman moves fifteen inches per day but the Hochstetter ice-fall which joins the Tasman is reported to move fifteen feet per day.

I had to find a suitable climbing companion. Rodda was, unfortunately, in Tasmania and R. W. Cawley, the Hon. Secretary of the Canterbury section of the N.Z.A.C., advised me to engage a guide through Len Crawford, who runs a small group of young guides, based on the Hermitage. Len Crawford booked me a guide for three weeks from the beginning of February.

We left Christchurch on January 14, quite exhausted by the hospitality we received, and reached our batch, which was on the Bealy spur some eight miles from Arthur's Pass. It was a very pleasant run of about 120 miles and I doubt if we met more than a dozen cars on the way. Motoring in the South Island is of a kind long since forgotten in this country.

Next day we visited the Ranger, Peter Croft, and he promised to look for a companion to accompany me on an ascent of Mount Rolleston, which is the highest mountain in the area, 7450 ft. We also met Hans Bohny, a former Swiss guide from Kandersteg, who runs an excellent restaurant in the little hamlet at the foot of the pass.

The weather seemed set fair and after two days spent in walking in the delightful country around the pass, I arranged to try Rolleston on the third day in the company of the young assistant Ranger, John Childs. We started at 5 a.m. and took the car to the top of Arthur's Pass and part of the way down the western side to the Otira valley. Here we left the car by the road side and followed an excellent path which had recently been made by the Rangers. Childs set off at a break-neck speed and soon left me far behind. After three quarters of an hour the path became but a faint track through dense undergrowth and missing my footing I fell headlong into a stream. The involuntary cold dip was quite refreshing as the weather was very hot. We then had to jump across the main stream—bridges are a rare luxury in New Zealand mountains—and followed moraine slopes dotted with the New Zealand variety of edelweiss.

The moraine slopes got steadily steeper and finally we took to a long



Photo: T. A. H. Peacocke]

MOUNT ROLLESTON FROM AVALANCHE PEAK.

(No. 58)

snow-slope which led to a col on the North ridge. On the way up we halted to examine the Otira face of Rolleston to see if we could detect any traces of a disaster which occurred the previous winter.¹ Two young New Zealanders and two young Englishmen, recently arrived from England, joined forces to attempt a new route on this face in June last year. The winter snowfall had not yet arrived and the face was almost clear of snow. It is a rock face, the steep part being about 500 ft. high. The party set off on the Sunday and failed to return. A search was started on the Monday, but the face was left alone as the party had been heard high up on the face on Sunday afternoon and apparently in good spirits. The search was resumed the following day in worsening weather. A camp was established half way up a broad couloir to the left of the face, on a rock ledge. Heavy snow fell in the night and an avalanche buried the tent, killing John Harrison, one of the leading Canterbury mountaineers. The search had to be abandoned owing to the storm. One of the missing party was heard calling for help on the Thursday, but it was, alas, impossible to reach him. This disaster involving the loss of five lives is the worst in the annals of New Zealand mountaineering.

Our examination with my monocular revealed what looked like a body and a rope. In February a party reached this spot and found one of the missing climbers with severe head injuries, still tied on to the rock. The rescue party said it was by no means difficult to reach the spot and it seems strange that none of the party could return for help before the bad weather set in. No trace of the other missing climbers has so far been found and the cause of the accident remains a mystery.

To return to our ascent, we continued up the ridge which was scree for the most part with a little rock. We did not need the rope and reached the low peak at 10 a.m. Baedeker would describe the climb as 'fatiguing but repaying'. Unfortunately, alas, we were not repaid, for the weather worsened and we became enveloped in cloud. My companion did not want to go to the high peak and I was too exhausted to press the point, so we descended. The view is normally very fine. There is a glacier on the eastern side and we caught glimpses of a pleasant looking ridge leading to the high peak. The descent was uneventful, apart from a fine glissade down the snow-slope and a bathe in an icy pool.

Next day the weather turned bad with a 'north-wester' and we decided to leave our batch and spend the next fortnight sight-seeing on the eastern side of the divide and visiting the beautiful lakes of Wakatipu and Wanaka, where we had a glimpse of Aspiring. We also visited Milford, where we were caught in a prolonged storm, twenty-three inches of rain in three days, which cut the road and threatened to

¹ See *A. J.* 71. 319-20.—EDITOR.

ruin our holiday. Luckily they managed to repair the road and we escaped after six days.

Milford is justly famed for the scenery. The mountains are some of the finest in New Zealand. Mitre Peak, 5500 ft., rises almost sheer out of the sound, and Mount Tutoko, 9000 ft., is an impressive sight. A few miles inland and close to the Homer tunnel, by which the road to Milford penetrates the mountain wall, rises Mount Christina, with its sheer southern face. Though these mountains are comparatively low, they are formidable ascents as the climbing starts from near sea level and the absence of paths involves hours of exhausting struggle through the dense rain forest.

On January 27 we left Milford, and reached the Hermitage on January 29, in perfect weather. On the way we got our first view of Cook and Tasman from a distance of fifty miles. As we got nearer more mountains came into view. The great ice-cliffs of Mount Sefton and the adjacent peak of the Footstool were a most imposing sight. On our right, the Tasman glacier was opening out with the Minarets and Elie de Beaumont gleaming in the distance, but the view of Mount Cook, rising nearly ten thousand feet above the Hermitage at a distance of nine miles, is hard to beat for sheer, majestic grandeur and rivals the Matterhorn as seen from Zermatt. The highest point is not visible but the Middle Peak is seen rising over the shoulder of the Low Peak. The mountain appears as a white gleaming mass in striking contrast to the greens and browns of the narrow Hooker valley.

I found that a guide had been reserved for me, a young bearded Australian who looked very tough. We discussed plans and arranged to leave at 9 a.m. next morning by a bus which now runs to the Ball hut. We planned to ascend to the Tasman hut at the head of the Tasman glacier, spending a night at the Malte Brun hut on the way. My wife would come with us to the Tasman hut and then fly back to the Hermitage by ski-plane. I would spend a few days getting fit on peaks such as the Minarets and Elie de Beaumont before moving to the new Plateau hut, where we would be able to attempt Cook² and Tasman. It was an ambitious programme and assumed perfect weather, but then February was surely the fine month. The first part of January had been fine, but since then they had experienced very bad weather and a lot of snow had fallen on the mountains. That evening we saw the great white face of the Low Peak flushed with the pink glow of the setting sun; and although there were a few suspicious-looking clouds about, I retired to bed and felt that my dream of forty years ago had at last come true.

² See *A. J.* 69. 265 for a sketch map of Mount Cook. Illustration no. 50 of the same issue shows most of the features of the Linda glacier route, described in the later part of this article.—EDITOR.

Next day we came face to face with stark reality. Thick clouds covered the mountains and heavy rain set in and fell all day. My guide said he was going off to Christchurch and would return when the weather improved. This was not a good idea, but the 'arrangement' was that I paid him £7 per day when we were in the mountains but nothing when we were down at base, so that I had no hold over him. The £7 included both his and my food and also the hut fees, which are often as much as 15s. per day. Considering this the charge was moderate.

The following morning, January 31, the clouds had all disappeared and the weather was very fine, apart from a strong wind. I immediately telephoned the guide, who seemed reluctant to return, but eventually agreed to come back by the evening. We spent the day in much-needed exercise around the Hermitage. No sign of the guide in the evening, but I presumed he would arrive in time to catch the bus to the Ball hut next day.

Next morning, February 1, the guide had still not arrived and the weather was fine though there was a strong wind. However, we could certainly have gone to a hut and this delay was exasperating. My wife decided to return to Christchurch and I resolved to move to the Unwin hut as the fleshpots of the Hermitage are only for those with a long pocket. A single room in the main hotel with food now costs £7. 10s. *od.* per day. We slept in Sefton Lodge at the back, which is perfectly adequate and is half the price of the main hotel, but still expensive.

The Unwin hut, which is the property of the N.Z.A.C., is very well appointed. There is a spacious living room with plenty of electric cookers, bunk houses for men and women and hot and cold showers. The highly capable Miss Bell acts as caretaker and was most helpful. She is a climber of some renown. The hut is very conveniently placed about two miles down the road from the Hermitage.

I was now in a quandary. The weather was fine, but I had no climbing companion and there was no news of the Australian 'guide'. Frankly, I had now lost interest in him, but I found two young Swiss in the hut. Peter Schlunegger and Herbert, whose other name escapes me; both were in the guiding syndicate. Fortunately, Peter was free and I engaged him. He comes from a great guiding family in Wengen. His father Hans, was a famous guide killed in a climbing accident shortly before the war³ and his grandfather was also a guide. Though technically a porter, as he had not yet taken his guide's certificate, Peter proved a fine climber and pleasant companion and what little success I had in the Mount Cook area is largely due to him.

Mount Sebastopol rises behind the Unwin hut and I spent the afternoon in an ascent, though I had to return from just below the summit

³ *A. J.* 52. 130.

owing to lack of time. I returned by the west side but lost the path and got involved in some almost vertical 'bush-whacking'. Eventually I came to a cut-off and though the path was only fifty feet below me I had to reascend some thousand feet and eventually got back to Unwin just as it was getting dark. It was a useful day's exercise.

Next day we set off in the Ford for the Ball hut. Apart from myself and Peter, there was Herbert and his young client John Jordan. The road is rough, but passable and the car saved us a twelve mile walk. The guides keep a considerable store of food at the Ball hut and we spent some time loading up. Outside we saw two keas. These handsome birds, about the size of a cockatoo, are inquisitive, mischievous and highly intelligent. One approached me apparently with the intention of untying my bootlace, but it caught my eye and immediately hopped away with a very guilty look.

The Ball hut is at 4000 ft. and we set off from there for the new Plateau hut, 7600 ft., at midday. 3600 ft. did not sound far, but we had first to descend several hundred feet to the surface of the Tasman and we were heavily laden. I carried a mere 36-40 lb., but the others had 60-lb. loads.

We proceeded up the Tasman for about one and a half hours and then reached the foot of the Haast ridge, which is on the north side of the Hochstetter ice-fall. Here the fun began. The Tasman has shrunk considerably in the last seventy years, and to leave its surface it is necessary to scale a formidable moraine wall which at this point must be 400 ft. high. This was an exhausting business and, to make matters worse, rocks were being blown off the top and fell bouncing around us. Luckily no one was hit. Above the moraine wall I expected to find a path, but the track, such as it was, led through long grass interspersed with villainous spear-grass and, like Mummery's famous path to the Plan de l'Aiguille, 'hid itself coyly from view at every third step'.

When we reached the ridge there was a rough track at intervals. The weather had meanwhile deteriorated and it began to rain. This soon turned to snow and thick mist. About 6 p.m. we reached the Old Haast hut, 6900 ft., and in view of the bad weather decided to spend the night there. It was none too clean and fairly primitive, but luckily there were some blankets. Cooking is by primus. I was very tired and out of training. Going up to a New Zealand hut is a very different business from the easy plod to an Alpine hut. I realised why Rodda had advised me not to postpone my plans too long!

Next day snow was still falling and it was very cold. We set off about 11.30 a.m. There were a good eighteen inches of fresh snow. The route was up the ridge, then by a steep snow-slope on the right (true left) and back to the ridge up snow-plastered rocks, where we roped up. The guides had hard work breaking the trail. From the top of the ridge

we descended a snow-slope in thick mist and driving snow to the Plateau hut. This is a magnificent new hut by any standards; comfortable bunks with sleeping bags and plenty of primus stoves and cooking utensils. It is owned by the Park Board. Like all the huts in the Park it is equipped with a radio, and Park Headquarters make contact with each hut at 7 p.m. In fine weather and suitable snow conditions ski-planes can alight on the plateau. Some parties come up by plane, but this can be a source of danger as in bad weather the parties may be unable to descend, not knowing the route.

Towards evening the weather slowly cleared and the mountains became visible. The hut is finely situated on the edge of the Grand Plateau with the Hochstetter ice-fall below. It is surrounded with an amphitheatre of peaks, the Anzacs on the extreme left, followed by the great East ridge of Mount Cook, leading to Middle Peak. Mount Cook, nearly five thousand feet above, dominates the view, with the Zurbriggen ridge rising very steeply towards the summit. The Linda glacier is mostly concealed by buttresses descending from the Zurbriggen ridge. Next comes the tapering snow-cone of the Silberhorn, with Tasman to the right and much foreshortened. To the right again is Mount Dixon, a shapely peak which is east of the Main Divide, and lastly Glacier Dome, a small peak not far from the hut.

Next day, after a very cold night, the weather was brilliantly fine, but so much fresh snow had fallen that the big climbs were impossible, so we made an excursion up Glacier Dome. This is a magnificent view-point, as in addition to the Cook-Tasman group we could see the full extent of the Tasman glacier right up to the Lendenfeld Saddle. The snow had fallen down to the level of the Tasman below at about 4000 ft. Malte Brun across the glacier looked particularly fine, with a girdle of low cloud. We returned to the hut and spent the rest of the day in idleness.

We arose next morning at 2 a.m. with the intention of climbing Mount Dixon. The route passed right under a menacing ice-cliff which had recently discharged a mass of ice-blocks, and at first light we found ourselves immediately below a formidable schrund. A direct attack was repulsed, but Herbert and Jordan managed to get up some very steep ground on the right. They announced that the couloir above was extremely steep ice, and as I had only ten-point Grivel crampons it would be impossible for me to follow. (Grivel crampons are too small for New Zealand ice-climbing and it seems almost essential to have long spikes with twelve points.) This was disappointing, so Peter and I attempted the South-east ridge, which we gained by a snow couloir next to Glacier Dome. After traversing about one-third of the ridge we found it so heavily laden with fresh snow that we had to return. The day was still young, so I suggested we should try the

Anzacs. This involved a rather wearisome plod across the Plateau glacier. The Anzacs gave us some pleasant climbing on steep and rather loose rock—nearly all New Zealand rock is bad—and along the heavily-plastered ridge to the highest point. From here we had a splendid view of the East ridge of Mount Cook, a very formidable climb. The East ridge is flanked by the East face, which has been ascended twice, and the Caroline face on the left, which so far remains virgin. It looks extremely dangerous and any route must be exposed to sérac fall, which happens much more frequently in these mountains than in the Swiss Alps.

On our return to the Plateau hut we found that the other two had reached the summit of Dixon; they were often waist deep in the snow on the final ridge.

The following day we planned to do the Silberhorn, but the night was so warm with no frost that we judged the snow to be unsafe after the recent heavy falls, and so reluctantly I passed an idle day. There were some fresh arrivals at the hut, John Lawrence from England with a party, and also some friends of John Jordan. They all departed to do the Anzacs. The weather remained fine, but a strong wind got up in the afternoon and howled around the hut.

Next morning, the wind having died down, John Lawrence and his party set off at 2 a.m. for Mount Cook. We left at 2.30 for the Silberhorn in company with six young New Zealanders, all hoping that we might also have a go at Tasman. We had to start well to the right and work back to the East ridge of the Silberhorn through a complicated ice-fall, where I cursed my short-pointed crampons. We reached the ridge above the steep lower section at 4.45 and here met the full force of the wind. We sheltered under a small ice-cliff in the hopes of the wind moderating. This gave me the opportunity to film one of the most perfect sunrises I have ever seen.

One of the parties soon returned; the wind had been too much for them. We pressed on up a fairly steep icy slope and reached a shoulder where the ridge flattened off before rising again. The wind got steadily worse; the other two parties returned and soon we, too, decided to follow suit. The weather was perfect except for this wind which made climbing on an exposed ridge impossible. On the way down one of the New Zealanders was blown off his feet and fell, dragging his companion with him. Mercifully they managed to stop themselves just above a formidable ice-cliff. We all got back to the hut about 9.45 a.m. after a short and disappointing day. John Lawrence's party were seen on the summit of Mount Cook at 2 p.m. and they returned to the hut about 10.30 p.m. We decided to attempt Mount Cook the following day.

I awoke at midnight to hear the wind whistling round the hut. Peter,

not unnaturally, was reluctant to start and advised delay, but I felt it was now or never so we left the hut at 1.40 a.m. in the company of another party of two. The wind was very strong on the Grand Plateau, but we found some shelter in the narrow trough of the Linda glacier. Here we were aided by the tracks of the previous party and wound our way through a maze of crevasses and across some rickety ice-bridges. One member of the other party felt unwell and they decided to turn back.

We continued across the debris of two tremendous ice-avalanches which had recently descended from the ice-cliffs above. The whole route of the Linda is menaced by ice-cliffs, often on both sides. It is certainly the most dangerous glacier route I have ever followed, and one is continually exposed to avalanches for a good three hours on the ascent and two on the descent. I was much comforted by remembering the dictum of Mummery, 'séracs lurch and totter, but never fall'. I am not altogether sure that he would have uttered these famous words had he climbed in New Zealand. Mount Cook has now been climbed about 250 times. Most of the ascents have been by the Linda and yet only two parties have been killed by avalanches.

About 3.30 we came to the sharp bend in the Linda, which now steepened considerably, and we made a line for Green's Saddle. When just below the slopes leading to the col, we traversed left beneath the worst ice-cliff of them all and then climbed up a steeply sloping shelf of good hard snow which led us to the Zurbriggen ridge at 6.15. Most parties normally follow a route called Jacob's Ladder, which leads direct from the snow shelf to the upper rocks beneath the ice-cap. Today, however, the rocks were so heavily snow-covered that it looked impossible.

The wind had been troubling us on the glacier and I feared a full gale on the ridge, but strangely enough the wind was only moderate. The rocks were, however, so deep in snow that we had to traverse round the first step, on to the East face, which is extremely steep. This traverse was distinctly exciting in my short crampons, for we had no time to cut steps.

Above the first step the ridge was still deep in snow and with much ice on the rocks. The rock is quite sound and would be easy if it were not iced up. At this stage of the climb I thought that we might reach the ice-cap, but feared that time and the wind would prevent us going further. However, to my no small delight, we got to the top of the rocks at 10.45—four and a half hours for 500 ft.! Here we paused a moment, unable to turn our eyes from Tasman, the tapering spire of the summit silhouetted against the blue of the sky, its knife-like southern ridge flanked by the icy bastions of its faces: surely one of the most beautiful mountains in the world.

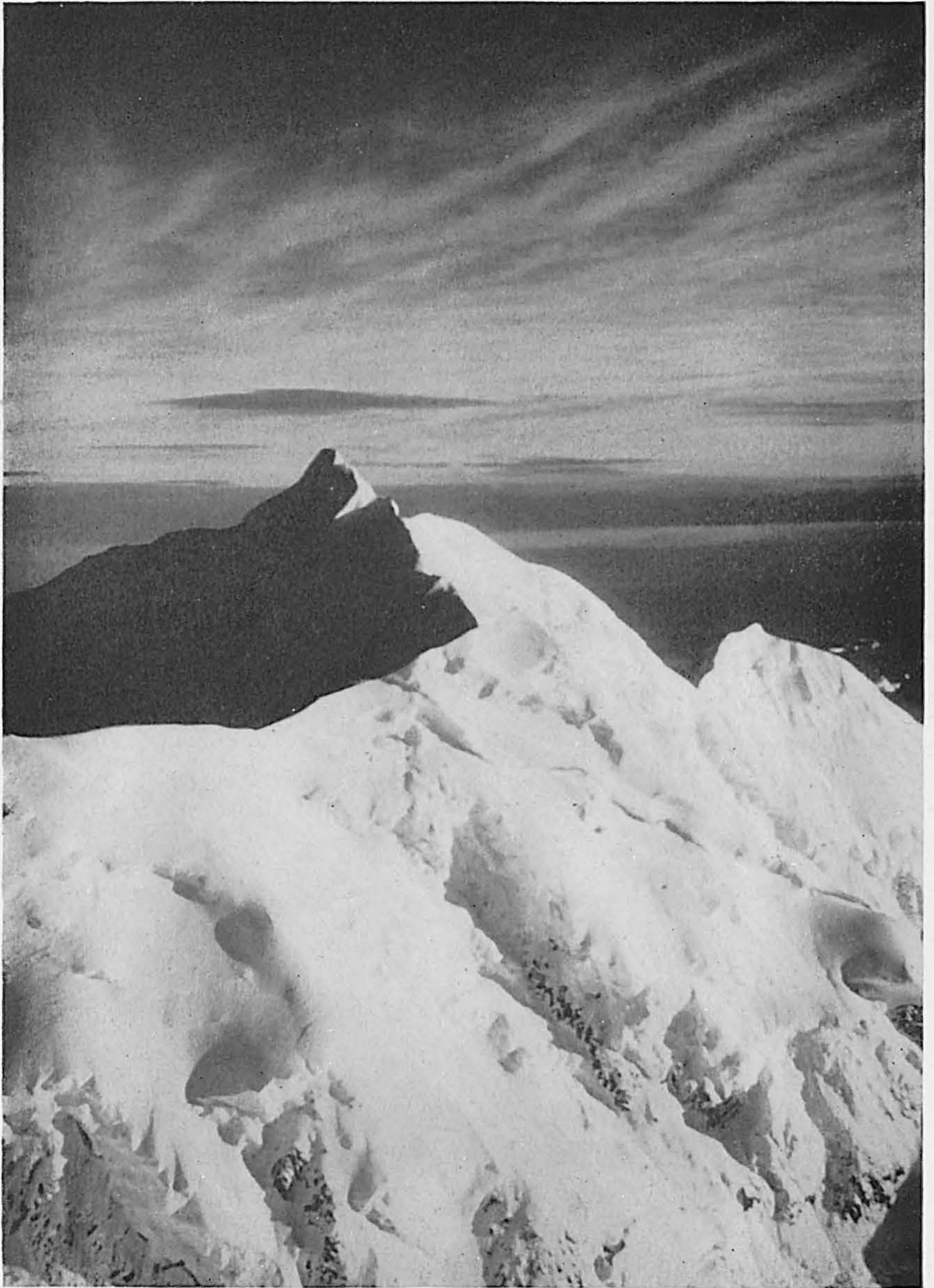


Photo: M. White]

MOUNT TASMAN FROM THE TOP OF THE ROCKS ON MOUNT COOK.

(No. 59)

The ice-cap proved to be covered with a thin layer of snow, up which it was possible to crampon in ten-pointers without cutting steps. The average angle is about 40° . On the steeper parts we used ice-screws and moved one at a time. The slope seemed endless, but at 12.10 it suddenly eased off and I realised that we were close to the summit. Though in a fairly exhausted state, I could not restrain my excitement and, bursting into a run, I joined Peter on top at 12.15. It was also Peter's first ascent of Mount Cook and we filmed each other on the summit, he having nobly carried my film camera to the top.

Like all mountains which greatly exceed their neighbours in height, the view from Mount Cook, like the view from Mont Blanc, is vast rather than beautiful. There was no cloud in the east and only some low cloud in the west and over the Tasman Sea. Range upon range of mountains stretched as far as the eye could see. Mount Aspiring was visible in the south and we could even see the Kaikouras to the north-east. Unlike Mont Blanc, there was an intense feeling of isolation and loneliness, due to the exposed position. The near view to the south was dominated by the great summit ridge stretching to Middle and Low Peaks. This looked to be in good condition and I longed to tread its crest. In appearance it is as formidable as any ridge I have seen in the Alps.

The icy wind reduced our summit halt to fifteen minutes. The descent of the ice-cap required care. A slip would certainly have been fatal—one party met their deaths in this way. We hurried down the Linda, much retarded by a breakable crust. The rickety ice-bridges were still standing. As we approached the Plateau hut which is about 150 ft. above the Plateau, we had a pleasant surprise. Four of the young New Zealanders came down to meet us, as they wished to be the first to shake us by the hand. Such a warm-hearted gesture was quite moving, but somewhat embarrassing. They stamped out a trail for us up to the hut. Drinks were all ready. They even tried to take off my boots until I protested. We were back at 8.15 p.m. after eighteen and a half hours. Mount Cook is certainly a great climb.

Next day, February 9, we descended to the Unwin hut as I felt the need of an off day. The weather was deteriorating and was worse the following day. The young New Zealanders arrived, having also been up Cook the day after us, and we all foregathered for a champagne dinner at the Hermitage. February 11 and 12 were still bad, but February 13 was fine, and as I had five days left we decided to fly up to the Pioneer hut on the western side of the Divide for a last go at Tasman. I had now obtained some fine twelve-point crampons.

We left at 6 p.m. by ski-plane and landed on the glacier just below the new Pioneer hut—the old one was destroyed by a rock fall a few



Photo: T. A. H. Peacocke]

MOUNT TASMAN FROM PIONEER HUT.

(No. 60)



Photo: T. A. H. Peacocke]

PIONEER HUT AFTER THE FIVE-DAY STORM.

(No. 61)

years ago, killing one of the occupants. The new hut stands on a spur of rock to the south of Pioneer ridge just below Mount Alack, a fine tapering spire of rock. The hut is at over 8000 ft. and well placed. Our plan was to spend two days on the surrounding peaks, getting used to my new crampons, and then to attempt Tasman, either over Lendenfeld, or from the Plateau reached by way of Pioneer Pass. We found four others in the hut, one being the well known climber Mrs. Mavis Davidson. We had a perfect sunset, looking across the névé of the Fox, and all seemed well.

We set out next morning for Mount Haidinger, a 10,000 ft. peak on the Divide, and climbed steep slopes to the ridge. On making the ridge we saw bad weather approaching rapidly from the west and an immediate retreat was necessary. Bad weather is not to be taken lightly in these mountains; we were soon enveloped in such thick cloud that it was difficult even to locate the hut. Shortly after our arrival the storm burst and half an hour later Mavis returned with her party, driven back from an attempt on Torres, and wet to the skin.

The storm continued with hardly a break for five successive days. A party of two who were attempting Malte Brun on the day the storm started failed to heed the weather signs and were found some days later frozen to death. At times the wind was so violent that I feared the hut would be blown away. Our wireless aerial became coated in one night with a sheath of ice nine inches by six. It was a hard job to get it up again during a lull in the storm and it did not stay up for long. I thought of the epic tale of Katie Gardiner and A. M. Binnie, caught near this spot in a tent about thirty years ago and eventually escaping with their lives down the Fox after eight days. How comfortable was our lot by comparison.

The situation in which I found myself was novel. Those of us who have done nearly all their climbing in the Alps are not used to being trapped in a hut with no means of escape. I was due in Dunedin on Monday, February 20 and it was now Saturday. Our food was beginning to run low. To cross the Divide by Pioneer Pass was out of the question. Even when the weather improved the fresh snow would have produced avalanche conditions on the far side. A descent by the Fox would involve two days as the ice-fall is impassable and there is no path through the dense bush on either side. Even were we to retreat this way, it would take a further two days to reach the Hermitage and my car. The only course open to us was to await a clearance and hope that a plane could be sent in. What we could hear of the weather forecast was bad, but on the following day, Sunday, the weather suddenly improved and by 9 a.m. it was clear. The surrounding peaks appeared one by one plastered with ice and snow.

We were soon collected by the plane, and had an exciting flight

down the Hooker valley with fine views of the West face of Mount Cook, and landed uneventfully on the airstrip at the Hermitage.

Thus ended my climbing in New Zealand. It was a great disappointment to be foiled of Tasman, but I must count myself fortunate indeed to have been able to ascend Mount Cook on my first visit. There were only three days in the month of February when the mountain could have been climbed. How lucky I was to have been at the Plateau hut on one of those days. The Southern Alps are a great range of mountains and they are rendered especially formidable by the severity of the weather. Exposed to the prevailing wind from the west over the Tasman Sea, they experience a very heavy snowfall—Mount Cook has the equivalent of 300 inches of rain per year. As they are less developed than the European Alps, one experiences much of the joys of the pioneers.

On my return to Christchurch I was liberally entertained by Bob Cawley and had the good fortune to meet many of the leading New Zealand mountaineers, amongst others Norman Hardie, Bill Bevan, Colin Gray and Neil Hamilton. I was privileged to attend an informal committee meeting of the Canterbury section of the N.Z.A.C. in the bar of Cockers Hotel, where Sir Edmund Hillary, now President of the Club, was present. In conclusion, I must express my thanks to all those New Zealanders who gave me such lavish hospitality and unfailing help. Perhaps one day I may return.