

pleasures which are sometimes sent as some compensation for disappointment over things on which one had set one's heart.

I was anxious to climb another peak of the Trolldtinder, that central peak which is often called Semletind, and which looks so specially fine from the Romsdal. This I did with Berg and another young Norwegian, from Isterdal by the high lying valley I have mentioned. The ascent from that side is easy, a scramble amongst boulders bringing one to the main ridge a little way S. of the top. This time, at last, I managed to hit on a perfectly clear day, and the view of Romsdal more than a mile below was fascinating indeed, while Store Trolldtind, a half mile away across the N. coom, and rising perhaps 200 ft. above us, was very impressive. The horizon was marked by a long procession of snow-flecked heights, but again I was struck by the lack of character of these inland mountains. Only far away to the W.S.W., in Søndmøre, a fine-looking mountain rose up.

There were other fine days before I left, but I made no more ascents, postponing to a future year (I hope !) a plan to visit the grand mountains at the head of Sundalsfjord, of which Slingsby has written in this JOURNAL.<sup>6</sup> I might have attacked the Romsdalshorn, which looks so fine from the valley, though when seen from the greater heights of the Vengetinder or Trolldtinder it becomes insignificant ; or Kongen (the King), grandest of the Isterdal peaks, a magnificent flat-topped tower with a tremendous E. face, which, however, is easily climbed from the back, I was told ; or the higher but milder Finnan, behind. (Being a clergyman, I could not, of course, think of attacking the Bishop !) But I decided that, on the whole, it would be most enjoyable to wander by myself at lower levels. The mountains should, after all, be seen from below as well as from above ; and I certainly do not regret my several walks through the Romsdal, than which there is surely no grander valley in Europe, and which I suspect of being at least a worthy rival to the Yosemite itself. But its road, in dry weather, is the dustiest I know.

Speaking generally, the coastal belt that I visited is a kind of happy combination of the Swiss Alps and the west coast of Scotland, yet with a distinct character of its own, the finest country for scenery that I know.

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## THE MOUNTAIN CLUB OF SOUTH AFRICA

By WILLIAM C. WEST

**I**T is most gratifying to be reminded once again that the members of the Alpine Club are interested in the progress of the Mountain Club of South Africa. A request to contribute an article to the JOURNAL has reached me from the Editor, couched in such terms that not to comply would indeed be churlish, though I cannot, even

<sup>6</sup> 'The Ice-axe in Trolldheim,' *A. J.* 23. 513-530.

remotely, hope to attain that degree of literary elegance and style which almost invariably illumines its pages. The recalling of Club friendships of long ago has, however, considerably eliminated the diffidence which assailed me.

In the ALPINE JOURNAL<sup>1</sup> of eleven years ago, D. Gordon Mills, a member of both our Clubs, wrote on 'Mountaineering Conditions in the Union of South Africa.' This article contained considerable topographical and other information. I do not propose to repeat any of this, but would rather suggest that his article be read or re-read as a preliminary to the perusal of my own. At the same time, a little elaboration of the geology of our rocks and its influence upon the technique of our climbing might be appropriate. South Africa is essentially a mountainous country and the varied and complex types of rock met with provide the climber with problems which require much skill and experience in their solution. Probably the best climbing is to be found on the quartzitic sandstone ranges of the south-western and southern portions of the Cape Province. This hard, firm rock, known as Table Mountain sandstone, weathers into formations ideal for the cragsman, varying from the almost horizontal structure on Table Mountain itself to the fantastic and twisted shapes rising to over 7000 ft. on the folded ranges extending eastwards for about 400 miles parallel to the south coast.

Inland from these, one encounters the Karoo system of mountains which are composed mainly of a compact and fine-grained conglomerate with outstanding dykes of intrusive dolerite. Many fine peaks are found in this extensive area between 6000 and 8000 ft. high, but relatively little systematic exploration has been done on them.

North and north-east of this area are the volcanic ranges of the Drakensberg and Basutoland. These lava beds form the highest parts of South Africa, and the crest of the Drakensberg and the lofty ridges of Basutoland are carved out of them. On these greater heights of 10,000 ft. and more, the action of winter snow and frosts is more evident, and the weathering out of spectacular, isolated peaks has resulted in magnificent scenery, and, despite the general unsoundness of the basaltic rock, some remarkable climbing feats.

In the Transvaal one finds the quartzite ridges of the Magaliesberg, where climbers from Johannesburg find excellent rock work. The Drakensberg zone continues northward through the eastern Transvaal, the dominant topography consisting of rugged spurs branching off at intervals from the main escarpment.

Granite ranges occur in some areas of Namaqualand and South West Africa and a few first class ascents of outstanding peaks have been made, but the difficulty of access through waterless and barren country has been a deterrent to frequent visits. In recent years, however, air travel has alleviated the position somewhat in providing approach to mountains hitherto difficult to reach. Even the Central African mountains have been visited by air.

<sup>1</sup> *A. J.* 49. 235-238.

As I have written elsewhere, one paragraph in Winthrop Young's contribution 'Mountain Prophets,'<sup>2</sup> which I venture to quote again below, seemed equally applicable to our own evolution, although, as a club, we were only born in 1891. We had climbing enthusiasts, however, dating well back into the Victorian days, the two last of whom we have now lost: Arnold William Spilhaus, who had climbed Table Mountain regularly since the early '70's, died two years ago at the age of 101, and William R. Ball, who died quite recently at the age of 94 years, first climbed the Mountain in 1865 and made regular ascents for more than 60 years, when he was seriously injured in a railway accident. Winthrop Young wrote: 'Mountaineering was a discovery. . . . It was perhaps fortunate that the discovery was not made until Victorian days, and then by a number of the leaders of thought. By the authority of their writing and by their dignity of approach to the new activity they set a seal of distinction upon climbing; and this preserved it as a practice respectable if inexplicable during the decades of popular derision and criticism. They also established a notable tradition of the spirit in which mountains must be climbed; and this, in our country alone, and in this sport more than in all others, has served to protect its force for good from the progressively corrupting infections of competition and publicity-hunting.'

Without too much appeal to the imagination one can recall amongst these earlier adherents, men who could be regarded as prototypes of two or three of your own pioneers. No doubt our early climbers were not unaware of this development in England, with the happy result that from the beginning our ideals have been identical with those held by the founders and members of the Alpine Club. And then, later, the visits to South Africa of Clinton T. Dent, Douglas W. Freshfield, Lord Bryce, Dr. A. C. Clark, and still later Capt. J. P. Farrar, the Right Hon. L. S. Amery, Dr. O. K. Williamson, Sir J. J. Withers, Lieut.-General E. F. Norton, Dr. Ph. C. Visser, General Sir Roger Wilson, Dr. N. E. Odell, Lord Malcolm Douglas-Hamilton, Irvine G. Aitchison and others, further forged the links which bind our Clubs together. By the way, Dr. Visser, who has spent several happy years amongst us as Minister Plenipotentiary for the Netherlands, has recently left for Moscow as Ambassador for the Netherlands. Perhaps the Caucasus was a contributory factor in the matter. General Sir Roger Wilson has resided in Capetown for some years since leaving India, and plays an active part in the affairs of our Club. Though there is no formal record to that effect, it can be regarded as a happy fact that, mainly through the influence of these members and of Alpine Club members past and present in our own ranks, the Alpine Club has come to be regarded as our parent body. Its ideals are our ideals, its code of mountaineering ethics we try to follow and maintain and its standard of good mountaineering conduct we strive for.

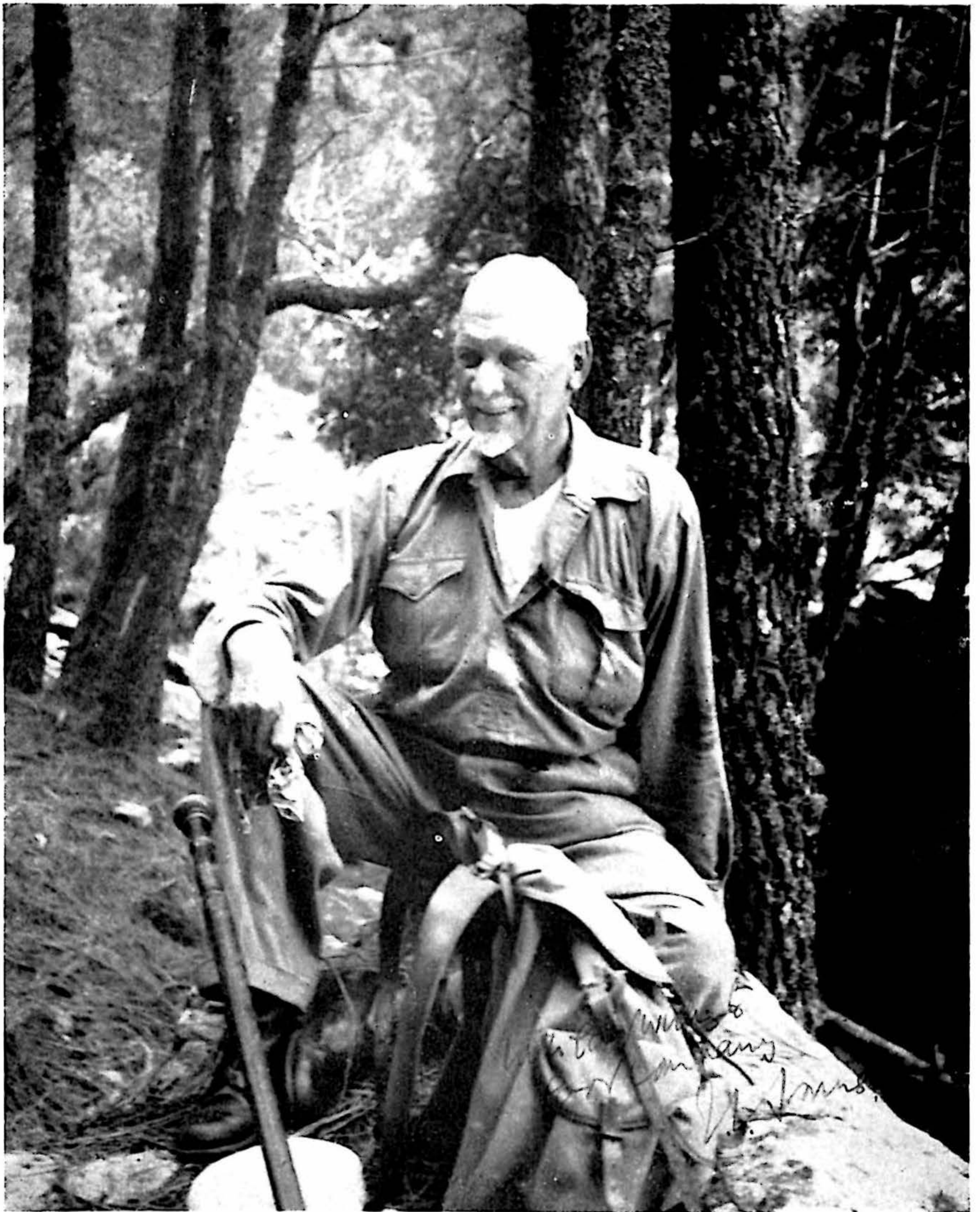
I have noted recently with pain the apparent stagnation of the Alpine Club in some directions, including the failure to improve in terms of

<sup>2</sup> *A. J.* 54. 97-117.

numbers its membership roll, whilst our own membership roll is advancing by leaps and bounds, with others straining at the leash and awaiting the day when age and other prerequisites permit them to approach the eye of the needle. I hasten to record my strong impression that this is purely temporary and is due almost entirely to the unhappy state of affairs in Europe in general which needs no elaboration. Surely we in South Africa are in the fortunate position of living in the best country in the world at the present time. During the war under the leadership of our great member Field Marshal Smuts, little South Africa made heroic history on land, sea and in the air, but, with some exceptions round our coasts, the actual horrors of war did not reach us in our territory. Today, it would be correct to say, we live in a land of plenty, few restrictions, much expansion and much prosperity.

It is not my intention to tell of wonderful mountains or remarkable ascents or of what individual climbers may have done, but rather to write of the development of our Club and of our general activities. The recently published issue of our own Journal records in rather more than usually prolific profusion some of the major ascents of the past year or so. We noted, after the First World War, a considerable increase in applications for membership and history is more than repeating itself at the present time. Our applications for membership are severely scrutinised, and although the eye of our needle might not be quite so narrow as the one in South Audley Street, nevertheless, it is narrow enough to prove impassable to all but those who can satisfy our determined standard of qualification. Rejections and diplomatic withdrawals are not altogether unknown. Contrary to the Alpine Club rule, our candidates must be proposed or seconded by a member of the General Committee, and this Committee member must be able to guarantee the *bona fides* and qualifications of the candidate with other members supporting. The influx of new members might seem to indicate that election is easier than it really is. There is a constant urge amongst a considerable section of youth in South Africa, and even those who are not so young, to belong to the Mountain Club. Its popularity is not entirely due to its mountaineering activities as will be seen later.

The membership of the Club at the present time is about 1000, of whom nearly 800 belong to the Capetown section, 140 to the Transvaal section and smaller numbers to the Paarl, Wellington and Stellenbosch sections. There is a Natal Mountain Club which is not a section of the Mountain Club of South Africa, though we exist together in the closest harmony and cooperation. A strong contingent from our section usually visits their annual camp in the Drakensberg. The reason why the Natal Club, at its formation, did not become a section of the Mountain Club of South Africa may be worth explaining. Under our Constitution, the committee of the Capetown section, augmented by one delegate from each other section, acts as a General Committee of the whole Club. Sections may elect their own Vice-Presidents, or may nominate a President, but cannot actually elect one.



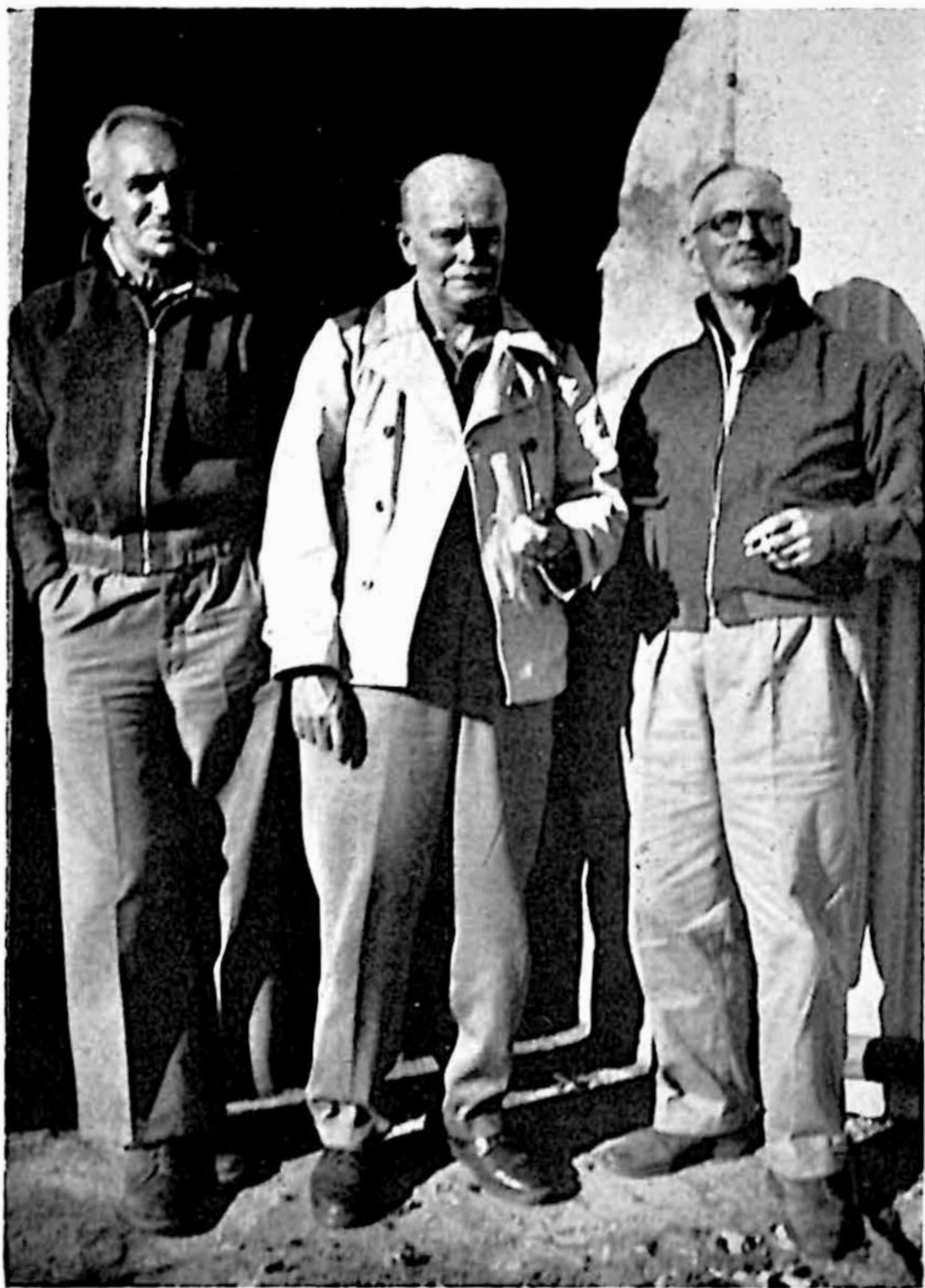
F.-M. SMUTS.

That is done at the annual meeting of the Club held in Capetown. The Natal mountaineers did not appreciate this arrangement and preferred to establish their own club.

Writing of the election of a President, we do not follow the procedure of the Alpine Club, viz., proceed to elect a new President triennially. We have believed in electing our most suitable member and retaining him as long as possible. Experience has proved that the advantages of this outweigh any possible disadvantages.

And now a few lines in general about the available quality of our mountaineering. We are restricted almost entirely to cragsmanship. We do get some snow and ice in small quantities and we make the most of it. Gordon Mills' article tells of the ranges of mountains from 30 to more than 100 miles from Capetown, and from my office window in a high building in Capetown, I enjoy the almost complete landscape. When the winter storm clouds rise and the afternoon sun falls upon them, I can see the snow on the slopes of dozens of peaks, but, unless the falls are fairly heavy and continuous, it does not last. On the slopes of Matroosberg (7434 ft.) the local ski club gets some excellent sport if only for a short season. Matroosberg is about 100 miles from Capetown.

When one remembers how South African youth, out of a white population only equal to that of a large European city, has distinguished itself in the realm of international sport, it is hardly surprising that we have evolved a school of young cragsmen of outstanding brilliance. Look at our advantages. With Table Mountain at our very doors, with about 300 routes worked out in detail, tabulated and classified on it, our enthusiasts climb as regularly throughout the year as others indulge in their cricket, football and tennis. And there are scores of other peaks within one day's journey of Capetown—at present we have no petrol restrictions. Their technique has not developed in any haphazard, hit or miss, manner. They are keen students of every phase of cragsmanship, both on the rocks and in our well equipped and comprehensive up to date library. Our climbs were classified as from A to E, the grading being from very easy to very difficult. Now our records of routes teem with E\* and even a *soi-disant* Super E\*, and we veterans can only imagine that the youth of today think the greatest thrills of life are only experienced when within an inch of losing it. The limit of human possibility is certainly being approached, but if one may judge by the extreme rarity of any major accidents, correct methods have been inculcated by our outstanding leaders, and applied. This high pressure climbing of all classifications, week by week, month after month, with holidays and expeditions added, and continued, as it has been in a few instances, to forty, fifty and more years, has produced some remarkable results. A few have recorded more than one thousand ascents of Table Mountain and other South African mountains, whilst the youngest member in the group of three accompanying this article, who is a meticulous diarist, has made more than 2600 ascents, and his total of feet actually ascended comes to more than



THREE SOUTH AFRICAN MEMBERS OF THE ALPINE CLUB,  
K. CAMERON, G. F. TRAVERS-JACKSON, W. C. WEST.



*Photo, Hans Wongtschowski.]*

ABSEIL PRACTICE ON GROOT KOP, TABLE MOUNTAIN.

seven and a half million, all climbed for the love of the sport and to the confusion of peak baggers. There is still an enormous field of climbing awaiting exploitation. A large number of the hundreds of country peaks have been climbed by the obvious and easy routes. Now our young enthusiasts are turning to frontal attacks and difficult faces and arêtes, and there are enough of them to keep this generation busy for their climbing careers, while plenty will be left for their successors.

We are running true to mountaineering form in other directions. We have long since reached the stage when we have our differences about the use or abuse of pitons, snap links and adventitious aids generally, whilst in 1946, when a party of our experts made the remarkable first ascent of the Great Spitzkop, in South West Africa, and in doing so used a piton and chiselled three or four small notches on the granite, it was seriously suggested that all reports of the ascent should be expunged from our records. (For details of this ascent, see *Mountain Club of South Africa Journal*, No. 49, page 28.)

We have a special Rock Climbing Committee whose duties are to investigate and to report upon modern safety methods, and to hold practice meets to test out these methods. Their first report appears in our last issue of the Journal.

The Constitution of our Club commits us to various activities only indirectly associated with mountaineering. One of these, perhaps the most important, and certainly the one which has gained us a considerable measure of public approbation and respect, is our search party and rescue organisation. Naturally the majority of calls for assistance come from the Table Mountain area, where fatal and non-fatal accidents occur often when climbers are attempting ascents involving varying degrees of difficulty; people get lost in bad and cloudy weather, visitors miscalculate the time and other factors in attempting ascents of the mountain, and come to grief. The very great majority of accidents happens to non-members of the Club. The organisation, with its apex in the office of our Hon. Secretary, ensures that, without any undue delay, those willing and able to turn out (a precise list is always kept up to date) are communicated with by telephone, receive detailed instructions, and are quickly engaged in their tasks. To facilitate this better and to lessen the vital factor of time, the Table Mountain area is divided into six regions, each self-contained and able to operate independently. It is a tradition, and definitely understood, that no member of the Club shall accept any reward, expenses, payment or compensation of any sort, and that, in any resulting publicity, no individual names of rescuers shall be acclaimed. This is also fully understood and recognised here by the Press. Round, and on Table Mountain, at 'strategic' points are kept stretchers, ropes, blankets, St. John Ambulance outfits, a Lowmoor Jacket and other necessary appliances, provided partly by our Club and partly by public authority, and made available for the use of the Club's search and rescue parties. The Club's activities in this respect have earned the admiration and respect

of large sections of the community not necessarily interested in mountaineering. The Club members are under no obligation to undertake this often very arduous and dangerous work beyond the promptings of their own human feelings and their sense of loyalty to the Club. Legally, it is police work. An extraordinary situation would arise if, for any reason, the Club did not respond, for no police body, or anyone else, could, however willing, possibly carry it out successfully.

All Sundays of the year, wet or fine, are interesting to us, and one of the most interesting is that on which we hold our annual War Memorial Service, usually on the last Sunday in February. The memorial itself, a bronze dial indicator, is at the very summit of the mountain, and the dedication ceremony was performed by General Smuts twenty-five years ago. He then delivered an oration<sup>3</sup> which was quoted throughout the world and was referred to as having been worthy of Pericles. The General gave me the manuscript of this remarkable utterance. I passed it on to the editor of one of the South African daily papers, and unwisely failed to recover it. The short service is quite undenominational. The occasion has developed into a reunion day for those members who are no longer able to climb and who are not looked at askance when they admit that on this occasion they had utilised the cableway and restricted themselves to a forty minutes' walk to the memorial. This is an occasion which our much loved member 'The General' or 'The Oubaas' will not miss if his presence is in any way possible. The closer we get to him the more the 'Field Marshal' recedes. He has never ascended by the cableway and he invariably delivers an inspiring 'off the record' address after the service. At 78 he can still walk the great majority to a standstill, and to see him breasting the final rise to the summit, clad in his khaki trousers, open khaki shirt and old panama hat, leaving the rest of his party straggling and struggling behind, is an inspiration and an emotional experience. And what ecstasy, fun and joy at meeting once again his old friends of the Mountain Club! He is in his cathedral and supremely buoyant and happy. Of course, the General is a tower of strength to the Club, actively associating himself with its functions as he does, and lending the weight of his great authority to its aspirations. His influence has negated other proposals, such as a recent one from an imaginative City Engineer, who recommended the construction of a motor road to the top of Table Mountain and the establishment of a lido at the reservoirs on the Lower Plateau. A few withering words from the General at our last dinner killed the project.

About fifty miles from Capetown, the main road to the north penetrates the first range of mountains. This is called Bain's Kloof, and it traverses magnificent mountain and river scenery for some twenty miles. At the head of this kloof is a small but very efficiently controlled 'Hotel in the Mountains.' This is a favourite rendezvous for climbers who like ready made comfort after their climbs. One of our members acquired an area of some 2000 acres in the kloof consisting

<sup>3</sup> *A. J.* 35, 92.



*Photo, T. Stafford Smith.]*

MOUNTAIN CLUB WAR MEMORIAL SERVICE HELD ANNUALLY AT THE SUMMIT OF  
TABLE MOUNTAIN.



*Photo, Hans Wongtschowski.]*

GREAT SPITSKOP, A GRANITE MASS RISING 3,000 FEET OUT OF NAMIB DESERT,  
SOUTH-WEST AFRICA.

of a subsidiary kloof and a portion of Bailey's Peak, and presented it to the Club in 1939. Another friend of the Club, who was subsequently made an Honorary Member, owned a farm and mountain land in the Waaihoek area, about 75 miles from Capetown, amounting in extent to some 20,000 acres, and in 1938 granted to the Club a servitude in perpetuity, including the right to build, maintain, use and occupy a hut thereon, with right of access to all present and future members of the Club.

The next large kloof through the first range and nearer to Capetown than Bain's Kloof, is du Toit's Kloof. This was our happy hunting ground of years ago, with only a small track through it. A great National Road has now been driven through, reducing the distance by road to the north by some 13 miles. The owner of most of the land in the kloof on its northern side was a Mr. J. H. S. de Wet, of the farm, Gevonden, situated at the exit from the kloof. He was made an Honorary Member of the Capetown section of the Club nearly forty years ago as an appreciation of his unfailing kindness and hospitality to mountaineers climbing near or passing through the kloof. Recently his son, Mr. Hennie de Wet, has presented the Club with about five acres of land in the kloof situated in beautiful surroundings, close to, but completely screened from the National Road, and with a perpetual water supply. We are about to erect a hut on this ground at a cost of approximately £800, the necessary funds having been assured from Club resources and subscriptions of members. This will serve as a base for another excellent climbing area. Mr. Hennie de Wet has also been made an Honorary Life Member of the Capetown section.

The Transvaal section purchased some sixty acres of ground below Champagne Castle in the Drakensberg for the nominal sum of £100, and propose to erect a hut thereon. The question of raising the necessary funds for the actual erection of the hut, fencing the area, planting trees, ensuring a water supply, etc., is at the present time engaging the urgent attention of the committee of that section. The Club has an excellent and strongly built four-roomed hut on Table Mountain. It was erected by the Capetown Municipality at the time of the construction of the first reservoir, and for more than forty years we have had the free use of the same. It has been maintained in an excellent state of repair by the Club. Before concluding my references to huts, I should add that the Club is contemplating the erection of a number of small high level shelters in suitable positions, amongst the country mountains.

The Union Department of Forestry and Department of Lands have acquired and control enormous mountain areas, apart from their ordinary afforestation activities, mainly for the purpose of veld, soil and water conservation. As a club, we are on the happiest terms with these departments and with other authorities with whom we come in contact. The Forestry Department has a policy of constructing huts and already has four or five in the large Cedarberg group, to the free use of which we are always welcome. Every member of the Club is

provided yearly with a membership card, the production of which gives right of access to any Government Forest Reserve in the Union, and to a number of other areas ordinarily closed to public use. We are regarded as allies, possessing the same aims and ideals as these authorities.

Another clause in our Constitution commits us to the duty of doing all we can to assist the Government in the enforcement of the Wild Flowers' Protection Ordinances. 'Nowhere on the earth could the vegetation of a country be more attractive and yet so easily accessible to the botanist as at the Cape. Here Nature spreads her gifts in inexhaustible bounty.' Thus wrote Adalbert van Chamisso more than 130 years ago, and it is equally true today. The first organised attempt at wild flowers' protection was the appointment of a special committee of the Mountain Club nearly forty years ago. There was a great danger of extermination of choice species through indiscriminate plucking and selling and export of choice bulbs. A powerful committee exists today with Provincial Council ordinances, regulations thereunder and a paid inspector, and we can still show our visitors our choice orchids, heaths and many other beautiful species. In our small Cape Peninsula of less than 200 square miles, we have the great concentration of nearly 2300 flowering plants, more than in the whole of Great Britain and Ireland. Is this not worth preserving?

Still another of our activities to which we are committed under our Constitution, is in assisting the authorities in the extinguishing of fires. Forest, mountain and veld fires are a particular menace in South Africa and both the Government Department of Forests and the Capetown municipality maintain elaborate firefighting equipment and squads for dealing with outbreaks which occur at all too frequent intervals during our summer months. Our young and intrepid members can always be relied upon to turn out when their services might be helpful.

I should mention that in Capetown we have the Western Province Mountain Club. Its members consist of the best type of our coloured population and we help and encourage them in every way. There are many excellent cragsmen in their ranks and they have set a standard which is distinctly creditable to them. They participate very readily in our search and rescue work.

Perhaps if I tread delicately, I may be permitted to mention a few words emphasising the further ties existing between our two Clubs attributable to the fact that the Alpine Club has elected several South Africans to its membership roll. We all know and appreciate the very high standard to which generally one must attain before one can hope to be elected to the Alpine Club. This is particularly so in what I will, for want of a better expression, call 'ice and snow' qualifications. Geographically situated as we are, we cannot hope to obtain the necessary practice and experience in this particular direction. We are under a great debt of gratitude to Clinton Dent and Douglas Freshfield who propounded a formula which satisfied your committee of those days that this was not an adequate reason for debarring a South African

mountaineer from membership. Still more do we owe to Capt. J. P. Farrar, who was even more definitely of this opinion. Percy Farrar, although not South African born, loved this country and its mountains and, I may add, its mountaineers whom he knew, and had traversed its great and wide spaces. With his widened vision and his dominant and powerful influence in the councils of the Alpine Club of his period, he sponsored, directly or indirectly, the election of further members from South Africa. Some of his views of those days—then considered almost revolutionary—are in practice today: closer cooperation between clubs and instructional courses for example. We have our instructional courses for the more advanced school of climbers under very competent leaders, and regular club meets for all who wish to acquire a proper knowledge of cragsmanship from the beginning. I am glad to note that A. P. Harper writes that Farrar, Bruce and Mumm in 1926 saw his view on these matters as far as New Zealand was concerned, and I might add as far as South Africa was concerned. I am glad to know that the Qualifications Advisory Committee, supported by certain of the 'Elder Statesmen' of the Club, are continuing the policy of Farrar and his predecessors, and if any representations I may have made have had any influence in this direction, I shall feel very happy about it.

I conclude this article by mentioning that we have Club offices and a large lecture room with a splendid library in the heart of Capetown, open daily, with lectures every Friday evening. All overseas mountaineers are welcomed with open arms and helped, and none with more pleasure than any member of the Alpine Club.

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## THE CUILLINS UNDER SNOW

BY LORD MALCOLM DOUGLAS-HAMILTON

**I** HAD always thought that the Cuillins under good winter conditions would provide excellent sport, but it was not until the winter of 1946-47 that I had the opportunity to confirm this. There was much snow on the mountains in December when I made one or two climbs up routes, like the 'Tourists' Route of Sgurr nan Gillean, which, though easy in summer, are good under winter conditions. December being early in the snow season, it was a matter rather of clearing snow away from rock holds than of finding any solid hold in the snow itself.

On January 15 I set out, together with a fairly large party, to climb Sgurr nan Gillean from the Bhasteir Corrie. The snow had packed a good deal more by this time, but it was thawing and one or two of the steps on the final pinnacle were somewhat insecure as there was a danger of the snow sliding. The summit was in mist and there was a biting cold gale; we descended by the 'Tourists' Route.