

## NEW ZEALAND NOTES, 1949-1950

BY DAVID HALL

THIS has been a bad season in the Southern Alps. The three weeks straddling Christmas and New Year, when so many are condemned to take their annual holiday, were atrocious even beyond precedent. The late season, February and March, had few rewards for those able to make use of it. Yet, paradoxically, some climbs and expeditions were made this year of first class quality and interest. I have drawn together here with the long-suffering help of my friends, Stanley Conway, Christopher Johnson, R. G. A. Logan and John Pascoe, some brief notes on the main mountaineering events of the season. I hope this selection will not seem arbitrary to those of my fellow-countrymen who are excluded, or distorted to those whom it includes. For such sins of omission or commission the guilt is wholly mine.

Tilman in *Two Mountains and a River* writes pleasantly of Himalayan climbing as 'still in that rude, happy and despicable stage when no one looks for a hard way up a peak if there is still an easy one, when there is no need for the aspirant to glory to ask himself whether or no his chosen objective is difficult enough to test his skill, courage and luck, but whether it is easy enough to offer a chance of his climbing it.' New Zealand climbing is a stage more mature; at least we are no longer always content with the easiest route to the summits of our little peaks. Virgins we still have, even on the Main Divide. There are still problems of exploration unsolved, even unrealised, on the difficult western flanks of the Southern Alps. But the aspirant to glory, seeking an unfading garland (if such a person exists or such a thing), has for some years now turned his attention to the unclimbed ridge of the familiar peak. Two seasons ago the great South ridge of Cook was climbed. This March the North-east ridge of Dampier fell to two resolute explorers.

This ridge had previously been assaulted twice from Clarke Saddle and a point reached which now bears the name Malaspina. Somewhat unfortunately some peaks in the Navigator Range bore names of Pacific explorers who never sighted New Zealand (La Pérouse, Dampier), while other seamen who actually visited these shores (Dumont d'Urville, Vancouver, Malaspina) had no peaks named after them. Almost by common consent the name Vancouver has attached itself to the unclimbed peak on the ridge to the north-east of Dampier, though it may never have been sanctioned by our Geographic Board.

On March 28 Albert Barley and James Forsyth climbed Vancouver by a steep, direct route from the upper Linda Glacier. They left the Haast Hut at 2 A.M. and reached the Divide not far from the peak at 8.45 A.M., cutting some steps but relying generally, in spite of the angle

on crampons. From Vancouver on they had some trouble with a narrow rock crest well plastered with ice. Thence a snow ridge led on to the main North buttress of Dampier, whose good grey rock gave access to a groove of snow and a scramble up the further side of a convenient couloir. Then a steep snow ridge brought them to the summit of Dampier (at 12.50). They descended by substantially the same route and regained the hut at 7 P.M.

Another climb whose times were remarkable (as well as the expedition itself) was the ascent of the three peaks of Cook by C. J. McFarlane and Norman Hardie on the last day of 1949 (a day of good omen to other parties too). They left a snow cave in the Hooker at the upper Cook bivouac site at 4.30 A.M., reached the Low Peak at 8.40 A.M., rested forty minutes, were on the Middle Peak in one hour's travelling, and thence, cutting steps, as they already expected to return the same way, reached the High Peak at 2.30 P.M. They returned by the same route and were at their cave at 8 P.M.

Other interesting climbs were made in the Cook district. Several parties reached Engineer Col from the Grand Plateau. Philip Gardner's party used this route to Lendenfeldt, Philip Cook's for the ascent of Tasman. On February 1 three guided parties climbed Tasman by the Syme Ridge (Henry Ayres and E. P. Hillary, Snow Mace and Oscar Coberger, Henry Ashurst and June Mulvay), while another (James Forsyth and Mervyn Burke) climbed the Silberhorn. Dampier was also climbed from the head of the Linda by a party (Oscar Coberger, E. P. Hillary and James Forsyth) led by Henry Ayres. After sitting in the Gardiner Hut during nearly all of January Andrew Anderson's patience was rewarded when he and Doreen Pickens climbed David's Dome.

In the previous August (1949) E. P. Hillary's parties had opened a new chapter in winter mountaineering. This remarkable series of expeditions began in late August when E. P. and Rex Hillary, Albert Barley and Frederick Edwards crossed from the Godley Hut to Malte Brun over the Classen and Tasman Saddles in a time which would be the envy of summer travellers, twelve hours. This party (with Marie McNeill replacing Rex Hillary) also climbed Elie de Beaumont, ascending to 10,000 ft. on the Divide on skis. The male members of the party then pressed on to Wilczek, reached at 4 P.M., which might have been considered a late hour to arrive on so remote a peak in winter. But they were back at their skis at 5.20 P.M. and took exactly 65 minutes to run down to Malte Brun. They then reversed their previous crossing of the Tasman-Classen Saddles and bettered their time by three hours. E. P. Hillary and Albert Barley later climbed Sturdee from the Gardiner Hut, taking skis to below Harper Saddle. The last of these feats was a crossing of the Tasman Saddle by Franz Skadarazy, Mervyn Burke and Hillary, taking 11½ hours from the Malte Brun Hut down the Murchison to the Ball Hut. Hillary apparently regards skis primarily as a means of locomotion and feels that mountaineering skill was more important than ski-ing technique on these journeys.

A number of indefatigables carried heavy burdens into remote valleys, proving by their discoveries that with us the unexpected is still the expected. Round about Easter 1950 four members of the Tararua Tramping Club, a Wellington club whose members are increasingly turning their attention from the forested ranges nearer home to the wider horizons of the South Island mountains, were moved by a lecture A. P. Harper gave to their club to complete a piece of exploration he had begun more than fifty years before. The party (L. D. Bridge, V. R. McCreadie, M. Bishop and R. Borthwick) penetrated to the headwaters of the Makawhio (or Jacob's) River, some 120 miles South of Hokitika, crossed a pass of their discovery near Mount Fettes into the untraversed Troyte Valley and descended it to the Karangarua River and the coast. They found a new lake, three new glaciers, and four new peaks. Their estimate was three days to the head of the Makawhio, their actual time six days. This valley is typical of West Coast travel—a river bed of immense boulders, above it dense forest through which the traveller pushes his way like a small boy trying to reach the front of a football crowd, and above the bushline, crags which prevent the use of a high-level route.

Further south several parties visited the Olivines. At Christmas-time F. V. Doidge, D. K. Taylor and D. A. de Terte in bad weather penetrated Stick-up Creek (which seems to be aptly named) with a view to Tutoko and climbed Mount Alice. Another party of inveterate snow-cavers (P. S. Powell, R. Rodda, Graham Ellis and G. Longbottom) made a determined attempt, defeated by weather and conditions, to open up a new approach to Tutoko, traversing new ground and climbing a new peak. Another party's attempt to traverse, with skis, from the West Matukituki to the Wilkin was frustrated by bad weather and abundant snow avalanches. Two parties climbed the steep South-west ridge of Aspiring in a lucid interval in the Christmas weather.

Earle Riddiford, who in recent years has done some interesting things on the western flank of the ranges between the Landsborough and (almost) the Wataroa, this year visited the Callery and the glaciers behind Elie de Beaumont, I do not know with what result.

Another exacting West Coast approach to the Main Divide was the return to the Butler of Stanley Conway and John Sampson, accompanied this year by Mathew Fowlds and Leonard Ryan. In spite of the Christmas storms they climbed two new peaks from the South Butler—the inelegantly named Dog Kennel—and the middle of the three Grey virgins from the hanging glacier on their western slopes. Two previous journeys into the Butler with Conway and Sampson and attempts on these peaks from the Canterbury side give me a nostalgic interest in this expedition, which solved a teasing problem tactfully, leaving scope for others to climb the two remaining virgins. To come out, they crossed the Grey Saddle into the Godley.

Stanley Conway, incidentally, has made two expeditions since then to the Rangitata headwaters, on one of which, in February, with John Pascoe and Bernard McGlynn, he attempted D'Archiac by a new route.

In January I accompanied James Glasgow, Keith Russell and Henry Scott to the Jagged Streamside of the rocky Arrowsmith Range. Glasgow and Russell made two first ascents—one of an unnamed peak north of Jagged, the other of two new peaks near the head of the range. This ascent of two of the four putative Bastions, using a route brought almost to success by Conway and Pascoe the previous Easter, completes a vexed chapter in recent mountaineering history. The name 'Bastions' had been transferred from a nearby group of peaks climbed some years earlier to this unclimbed group which will, subject to the approval of the Geographic Board, be renamed the Spires. My own contribution to this expedition went little beyond envious applause of my more vigorous companions, though Scott and I traversed Jagged, climbed also, another day, by the others.

In the Godley this season travellers were caused great embarrassment by the erosion of the glacier ice above the hut. Access to the glacier from the hut is to be gained now either by a two-hour encounter with the cliffs above or by fording the Godley River, neither alternative being very attractive. It is a pity that such an excellently built hut should be of diminished use.

The adventures of snow-cavers would require an article to itself. They ranged from near-asphyxiation to exposure to a mocking sky by the thawing out of the roof overhead. The use of caves is now widely accepted here and has in many areas given parties a valuable extension of mobility, besides providing, in bad weather, better shelter at high levels than a tent.

Many more climbs than I have mentioned here were made during the season, bad as it was. Clubs are paying increasing attention to training new members. This season has not been disfigured by accident. The guides' training scheme at the Hermitage is yielding excellent results. Indeed, everything is looking up—except the weather. It will be noticed that a fortnight in the Southern Alps rarely yields more than a couple of climbs. In a sense this speaks for itself, but it is difficult to sketch briefly the amount of effort and the distances covered to attain these few objectives; it is even more difficult, where such great variations in conditions can be met, to put ascents in an order of merit.