

## NEW ZEALAND NOTES

By NORMAN HARDIE

THE rapid increase in climbs and climbers continues in New Zealand. Each season more new ice-face routes are established and people are extending the normally recognised summer climbing months into most of the spring and a major part of the autumn.

During November, 1962, just before the ice became excessively hard, as it does in mid-summer, a party of four made the first ascent of the South face of Mount Cook. It was a long struggle on ice and glazed rock in the shadow of the peak, on a face which has drawn little attention in the past. They emerged high on the rarely climbed South-east ridge and traversed the mountain to the Hooker side. The same group made other notable climbs. They are P. Strang, J. McKinnon, J. Milne and R. Stewart. The latter has taken over the editorship of the *New Zealand Alpine Journal*.

Mount Sefton is a very formidable mountain from one side, with a relatively easy slope above an inhospitable access on the other side. Aircraft have been used to fly climbers to the foot of the easy slopes and the mountain has perhaps lost some of its stature. The difficult side has a ridge which has been climbed only a dozen or so times. The face beside this ridge has drawn some variations on the ridge theme, but this year the face, directly under the peak, was attempted for the first time. With the main problems overcome, and the trio just 200 ft. from the summit, a sudden storm enforced a retreat.

The May, 1963, *A.J.* reported an earthquake in New Zealand causing spectacular avalanches. Fortunately no one was high in the mountains at the time. It appears that the whole of the Cook area was severely shaken and some ridges were badly loosened. Three months later an accident occurred and the earthquake is blamed for it. Eight people were asleep in the highest hut in the country when a major rock fall occurred two hundred feet up the spur. Most of the rocks dropped to the neighbouring névé but some kept high and knocked in the wall of the hut. Three people were injured and one killed. The latter was Gilbert Murray (grandson of the critic G. M.). Gilbert made a lasting impression in New Zealand as a mountaineer and an Outward Bound instructor. The hut had to be demolished and a new building will be constructed on another site.

Other ranges have been receiving their share of attention. Increasing in popularity are the Darrans, one of the few districts where

sound granite can be found. Previously almost inaccessible, a new road and amphibious aircraft have opened the access to them. They are notorious for the bad weather that has protected them. It was in this area that Mike Gill gained most of his experience before climbing Ama Dablam on his first Himalayan season and Kantega on his second.

Sir Edmund Hillary, with a far better excuse than the over-worked snowman, had a Himalayan season of school building and climbing. The party included a particularly strong New Zealand trio in Gill, mentioned above, M. Ellis who accompanied Hillary five years ago when they were 'Hell bent for the Pole', and Jim Wilson who has accomplished many good New Zealand climbs and several in Antarctica. Last summer he and the geologist B. Gunn made the first ascent of Mount Lister (13,350 ft.) after a marathon climb from a geologist's tent many miles from their objective. Wilson is now at the University of Benares and he is hatching several Himalayan plans.

Six local mountaineers were invited last year to Antarctica to give elementary mountain instruction to American scientific field parties. They lived in the main McMurdo Base for three weeks and then flew back to Christchurch. For some years it has been noticeable that New Zealand survey field parties have been able to cover rougher country and need fewer air drops when out on their mapping programme. Their parties contain a geologist, a surveyor and two assistants who have to be reasonable mountaineers. The American groups have seldom included mountaineers, especially those experienced in ice or snow, and the brief courses are an attempt to overcome this gap. I was in the group last summer and it was a rich experience to be instructing men who were so keen to learn. The work was made more enjoyable when the daily return from the field was to such a relaxing and well supplied Base.