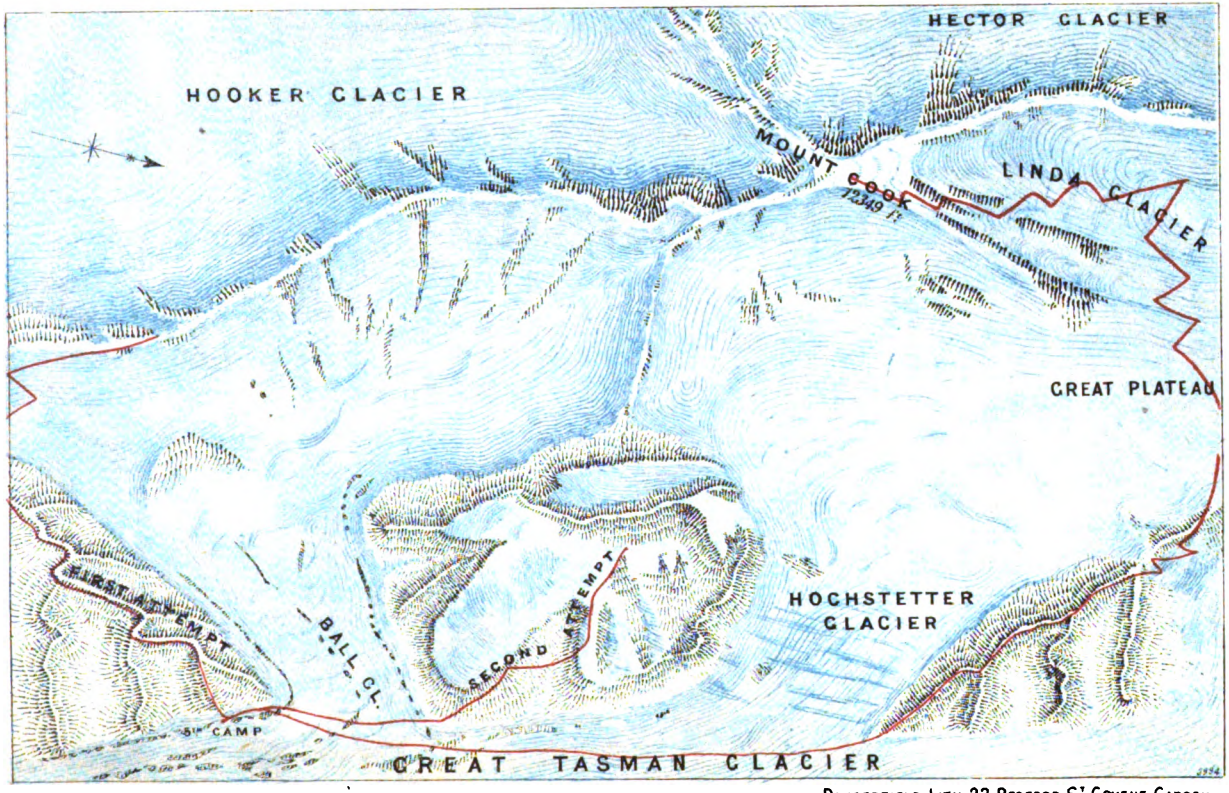
MOUNT COOK.

REVᴰ W. S. GREEN'S ROUTE.



DANGERFIELD, LITH. 22, BEDFORD Sᵀ COVENT GARDEN.

Digitized by Google

THE

ALPINE JOURNAL.

NOVEMBER 1882.

A Journey into the Glacier Regions of New Zealand, with an Ascent of Mount Cook. By the Rev. W. S. Green.

II.

MOUNT COOK, as viewed from the centre of the Tasman Glacier, presents a grand array of inaccessible ice precipices, and but three possible lines of attack from which the mountaineer can make his selection. After our first inspection all these presented such difficulties that we entertained the thought of abandoning any attempt from its eastern side and of seeking an easier route from the Hooker Glacier. We had had no opportunity of examining for ourselves the south-western side of the mountain, of which, however, I had a photograph; and, as Dr. Haast's opinion was strongly against such a route, and its inspection would certainly involve a loss of two or three days, we determined to make our attempt from the side of the Tasman Glacier.

Of the three possible lines of attack above referred to the first which claimed our attention was the long southern arête, but, consisting as it did of abrupt notches, one of which looked quite hopeless, we at first abandoned the idea of attempting this route. We next inspected the eastern arête running up from the central spur, but it looked most unpromising, and seemed to end in the face of a precipice near the lower southern summit of Mount Cook.

The northern arête, or that which seemed to join Mount Cook with Mount Tasman, was the last to be considered; its upper portion looked as easy as we could desire, but how to get at its base was the question, as the Hochstetter Glacier, with one of the grandest ice falls imaginable, seemed to fill the whole space between Mount Cook and Mount Tasman with a chaos of séracs.

Digitized by Google

We detected what might be a plateau above its lower fall. If this existed it might be free from crevasses, and afford us a passage to the foot of the arête; but as the foot of the arête itself, so far as we could see, consisted of vertical slabs of bare rock overhung by ice cornices, from which we saw avalanches falling, a new difficulty here presented itself. Spying through our binoculars till every crag became familiar to our eyes, I became conscious of a certain want of continuity in the ridge, and Kaufmann expressed his belief that the arête was really double, and that if it were, a glacier would fill the hollow between its two spurs, which might prove a practicable route to the upper snows. Our decision was therefore that, supposing we could reach the upper plateau of the Hochstetter Glacier, these northern arêtes looked the most hopeful, but, considering the uncertainty of being able to overcome the first difficulty, and as the inaccessibility of the southern arête, which was the one nearest to our camp, was not a proved fact, we decided to give it a trial, and, failing by that route, to try the cliffs of the central spur, and by ascending them try to cross the upper portion of the Hochstetter Glacier to the north-eastern arête. Should that prove impossible we would be at all events in a position to attempt the eastern arête.

If we failed in all these directions nothing remained but to try and overcome the difficulties presented by the Hochstetter Glacier, by ascending the spur which came down from the direction of Mount Tasman on the northern side of the glacier.

On February 25, the morning after we arrived at the conclusion that our first attempt was to be by the southern ridge, we were astir at 5 A.M., and as we sat amongst the boulders discussing a hearty breakfast the sun just touched the peaks of Mount de la Beche with his rosy beams. The glacier lay still in cold grey gloom, the music of its streams hushed, and the bed of the brook which chattered over the boulders near our camp every afternoon quite dry, awaiting the warm sunshine to rouse its springs from their icy sleep. A pair of keas sailed about the crags, uttering wild screams. The shrill whistle of a woodhen answering its mate came from the scrub on the mountain side. Daylight was quickly creeping down the mountains, and as we wished to be out of the warm valley before the sun rose we shouldered our packs, consisting of rugs for a bivouac and provisions for three days, and filed out of camp at 6 o'clock.

For about a thousand feet we ascended steep slopes covered with veronica scrub and patches of mountain lilies, the

Digitized by Google

Veronica macrantha, with its large white blossoms, being particularly beautiful; and as we reached the top of the ridge and looked down the steep cliffs on to the Ball Glacier and across to the great ice falls and snow-clad precipices of Mount Cook, bathed in the brightness of the morning sun, we thought we had never seen a grander exhibition of mountain glory.

We climbed upwards, with the Ball Glacier on our right, the still morning air rent every now and again by the crash of an avalanche from the opposite cliffs. Sometimes we followed the arête, and occasionally took to easy snow slopes. At 5,000 feet we reached what appeared to be about the line of perpetual snow, and from all I have seen since I believe I am right in saying that the mean snow line in the Southern Alps is 3,000 feet lower than in Switzerland, and conditions are met with at 7,000 feet which are characteristic of the 10,000 feet line in our Northern Alps.

The Alpine plants collected this day were most interesting. The familiar aspect of the gnaphaliums and of a yellow ranunculus could not fail to make it difficult to realise that the whole diameter of the earth and the tropical girdle of non-alpine conditions cut us off from direct connection with those northern regions where almost the very same little alpines abound. Some unfamiliar forms were also present; one which turned out to be a species of the genus *Haastia*, new to science, we discovered at an elevation of 6,500 feet. At this same level we met with our last grasshopper and last dark brown butterfly. Beyond this all life ceased, except so far as it was represented by an ubiquitous little lichen. One point which seemed characteristic of the Alpine vegetation when compared with that of our northern lands was that with the exception of the yellow ranunculus all the flowers were white.

Mounting these névé slopes and rock ridges, we at length came to the last patch of yellow sandstone rocks, beyond which the upper plateau of the Ball Glacier curved gently upward to a saddle in the main arête.

We were now 7,000 feet above the sea, so we decided that these rocks should be our halting place for the night, and gladly we eased our shoulders of the knapsacks. After a short halt Kaufmann and Boss, taking the rope and their axes, went on towards the arête, leaving me to secure a few photographs and sketches. In an hour my men came back, looking rather glum. They had reached the ridge, but the very first rocky tooth brought them to a stand. They said they feared it was hopeless, but I should come and see for myself.

Digitized by Google

Accordingly I roped up, and zigzagging up the last curve of the névé, we reached the saddle.

Well do I remember the aspect of the Schreckhorn, when, ascending the Finsteraarhorn from the Viescher Glacier, its grand peak first becomes visible. Such a view now burst upon us. Deep down beneath lay the Hooker Glacier, and beyond it the grand ice-seamed crags of Mount Sefton towered skywards. Further off lay the mer-de-glace of the Müller Glacier, with its lower moraine-covered termination lost in the blue depths of the valley at our feet. It was a glorious day, scarcely a breath of air stirring; no cloud visible in the whole vault of blue; ranges upon ranges of peaks in all directions and of every form, from the ice-capped dome to the splintered aiguille. The ridge connecting Mount Sefton with Mount Stokes alone prevented our seeing the western sea. Such a scene on such a day was our first really alpine experience in New Zealand.

Immediately on our right the saddle contracted to a narrow snow arête, along which we advanced cautiously to the base of the first rock tooth, which proved to be a tottering mass of splintered slate. We climbed the first crag with great caution, there being nothing to lay hold of but slates, which gave way with the least pressure. The ridge joining this spike with the next, which was about 20 feet higher, and so loose that I believe we could have shoved it over in either direction, trembled beneath our feet as if undecided whether to tumble towards a big crevasse in the glacier to the right or go thundering down into the Hooker valley. Climbing further was out of the question. To return to the snow and cut round the base of these rocks above the large bergschrund would have been possible, but we would have only reached another rock tooth of much more formidable dimensions, and which we could not have turned, as it was flanked by precipices. Its face looked quite inaccessible, and as it was only one of a dozen which were in sight we gave up the route as impracticable and returned to our knapsacks.

There was now no object in staying up here for the night, so, shouldering our swags, we descended to the camp, arriving there shortly after dark.

On our way down we examined the cliffs on the opposite side of the Ball Glacier, as on our former reconnaissance we had failed to discover any line by which they might be scaled. We were now able to select a snow-filled couloir, and though it was swept by avalanches we hoped we might find a way up by its side.

Digitized by Google

The object of ascending these cliffs was, as the reader will probably remember, to reach the platèau over the Hochstetter Glacier, and by it the northern arête.

Our attempt and failure, and the doubtfulness of immediate success by another route, taught us that we should make provision for a long delay. Accordingly, on the 26th Kaufmann and Boss rose early, and, taking the gun, descended to the lower camp, returning at night with flour, meal, a few ducks, and some tins of meat. We buried the ducks in the ice with our other fresh provisions, and supped that evening off fried bacon, boiled parrots, and porridge.

On the 27th we started from our camp at the dawn of day, and after some delay in cutting steps, we gained the surface of the Ball Glacier, crossed it towards the couloir, and, ascending a great talus of mountain *débris*, commenced our climb. At first the rocks were easy, giving good hand grips, then came steep streams of stones, which we crossed to the right, hoping to get round the spurs towards the Hochstetter Glacier, but, finding this impossible, we halted on a projecting crag to partake of some refreshment and to consider our next move.

It was splendid weather, and the endless booming and crashing of avalanches testified to the warmth of the sunshine which all the forenoon struck with full power on these eastern precipices. While here we were startled by an immense rock avalanche. Not far from us was a couloir, down which there seemed to be a perpetual fusilade of stones from the cliffs above. A crash rang through the air, and, looking towards the gully, we saw it enveloped in a cloud of brown dust, from which fragments of rock flew to long distances. The crash became a roar like thunder, the whole mountain shook, rock after rock flew downward, splintering themselves to a thousand atoms and starting fresh masses. Downwards, downwards continued the smoke and din till it died away far below, leaving us to congratulate ourselves that we were not under it, but making us more anxious concerning the small falls of stones which were continually coming down across our track.

The ice fall of the Hochstetter Glacier was now to our right, and, as we were about 3,000 feet above the Tasman Glacier, we could make out the plateau above the ice fall. To get at it, however, was the difficulty. That we must ascend higher was beyond doubt—so up a steep snow slope we went for 1,000 feet, till we came to the base of a vertical cliff. A snow couloir to our right was cut off from us by an open bergschrund which Kaufmann did not admire, so we took to the rocks on our left, which became more and more difficult as we advanced.

Digitized by Google

It was impossible to avoid dislodging loose stones, so we shortened up the rope in order that the stones sent down by Kaufmann, who was often immediately over my head, might not acquire too high a velocity before coming into contact with my skull, and that I might not immolate Boss, who was often vertically beneath my feet. At last we came to a ledge beyond which advance was impossible. Kaufmann reached it, we slacking out rope to him; but he had to lower his knapsack to us ere he could effect his retreat. We descended to the snow slope, and, cutting steps along over the bergschrund, gained the foot of the couloir, which we found very steep; but after an hour's step-cutting we reached the top and stood on the first bit of rock we had met with for nearly 2,000 feet upon which it would have been possible to lie down. Selecting it for our night bivouac, we set down the knapsacks, which had proved weary burdens to us in our long climb.

The way ahead was still undiscovered, so, without any delay, we proceeded to scramble upwards, it being impossible to get round in the wished-for direction to the right. Climbing once more became very difficult. We were now 8,000 feet above the sea, and the rocks we had climbed, hoping that they would prove the topmost ridge, only brought us to some great vertical slabs of sandstone, which looked very doubtful. Boss and I sat down on a crag and let Kaufmann go on to see if we could ascend any farther. He set aside his axe and carefully climbed to the top of a crag from which he could see over the ridge immediately above us. It was a perilous climb. Finally he got stuck, and singing out to us to guide him in his descent, as the rocks overhung, he cautiously wriggled down the clefts, and satisfied us that we were again brought to a stand.

A possible route was yet open — viz., to descend about 3,000 feet by a different couloir from the one by which we had ascended, and reach a part of the lower cliffs nearer to the ice fall, from which we might work on to the right. But as it was not unlikely that we might be landed in a cul-de-sac, and as the climb would involve nearly a day's work in itself, and particularly because from our high elevation we were able to see that the route to the plateau was quite practicable by the Mount Tasman spur, we decided to descend as quickly as possible, and to try to reach our camp before dark.

We soon regained our knapsacks, and after taking a few mouthfuls of food commenced our retreat, descending the snow couloir with our faces to the slope, and keeping a good hold with our axes. After passing the bergschrund in safety, we were able to make a standing glissade; then, after more rocks,

Digitized by Google

another glissade, and so got back to the lower couloir, and partly by climbing, partly by glissading down streams of stones—stones and all going down with us in a mild form of avalanche—we reached the bottom of the cliffs just at dark. The full moon rose in a clear sky, and by its uncertain light we threaded our way through the crevasses of the Ball Glacier, occasionally plunging knee-deep into a clear pool which we had mistaken for a patch of shadow, and at 9 P.M. reached our camp, feeling rather down-hearted at a second failure. We were very tired, as we had climbed for nearly seventeen hours, with heavy packs on our shoulders; our knuckles were all barked and the skin quite worn off the tips of our fingers from clutching the sharp rocks, as we had no time to select the smooth ones.

Next day we spent in camp washing clothes, baking bread in an oven built of stones, feeding up, and preparing provisions for our final attempt by the Mount Tasman spur.

Photography in the High Alps. By W. F. Donkin.

(Read before the Alpine Club, Feb. 28, 1882.)

I ONCE showed a lady who had never been to Switzerland a photograph of the Gorner Glacier, taken from the châlets just above the wood on the way up to the Hörnli, and her remark was, 'How steep that road must be!' This remark, however, coming from a person who had never seen a glacier, does not indicate lack of perception in the individual so much as failure on the part of the photograph to represent the facts in their true proportions to the inexperienced eye. It is a matter indeed of common observation that Swiss photographs, of the smaller sizes at least, give scarcely any idea of the scale of magnitude of the mountain and glacier scenes with which we are familiar. Nor is this to be wondered at when we consider how easily the eye is deceived when surveying the scenes themselves: we set off to climb a mountain which looks close at hand, it takes us hours to get to its base; we notice a patch of snow, apparently a few yards wide, up on the rocks above, by the time we get there it has expanded into a snow-field that takes the best part of an hour to cross. After having laboriously educated the eye to estimate distances in the Alps with some approach to accuracy, we go, say, to Scotland, and allowing ourselves a couple of hours on a misty morning to reach some heathery knoll, we find ourselves on the top of it in about forty minutes. Perhaps the chief cause of this uncer-

Digitized by Google