NEW ZEALAND NOTES.

Miss Rosamund Harper, daughter of Mr. A. P. Harper, President N.Z.A.C., has been elected a member of the club. This is carrying membership of the club into the third generation, since Mr. Harper, senr., Miss Harper's grandfather, was the first President (1891) of the N.Z.A.C. and was the first man to cross—with three Maoris—the Southern Alps and go down the West Coast in 1857.

It is hoped to have a big 'National Park,' to cover most of the West Coast Alpine country, constructed shortly. Such a reserve would, of course, protect the flora and fauna for all time.

Captain H. E. L. Porter has accomplished the ascents of Douglas and Elie de Beaumont.

The Disaster on the Tasman Glacier.

On January 18, 1930, a party consisting of Miss Doris Herbert Brown, aged 38, Miss Helena Keane, aged 24, Miss Mary Monteath, aged 20, Miss Dorothy M. Smith, aged 26, together with the acting-guide J. E. E. Blomfield, aged 20, left the Hermitage (2444 ft.) for the Malte Brun hut: distant 24 miles (5700 ft.). They proceeded by motor for 10 miles, and walked a further 3 miles to the Ball hut (3900 ft.), which they left in good form and high spirits for the 8-mile tramp to the Malte Brun hut, where they spent the night. They reached the hut in 4½ hrs.—fair average walking. The weather on this day was threatening. On the way up they met Dr. Bradshaw and the guide Englestaad, who were going down to the Ball hut, and who had left the guide Charles Hilgendorf (aged 21) at the Malte Brun hut.

The party left the Malte Brun next morning in rainy weather *en route* for the Ball hut. The question of starting down in such weather was discussed, but as two of the girls were obliged to catch the next day's motor due out from the Hermitage, it was decided to set out despite the rain. This was a fatal decision, costing them all their lives.

They left the hut at 10.30 a.m., leaving the guide Hilgendorf to clean up. He followed at about 12 noon, when the weather appeared no worse than at 10.30 a.m. He had not gone far down the glacier when a violent storm gathered, accompanied by much thunder and lightning—so much so that he actually turned back for about 100 yards, but then changed his mind and again proceeded down in the storm. The wind was from the N.W. and of hurricane force, compelling Hilgendorf to crawl on the ice at times. The ice was very glassy and hard owing to the rain. Hilgendorf was wearing crampons, which gave him good foothold, but the rest of the party in

front had nailed boots only. As Hilgendorf was battling his way down, probably about 2 hrs. after leaving the Malte Brun hut (and this portion of the way was the roughest of the ice travelling), he came upon Blomfield's rucksack, and about 80 yards farther on, the body of one of the girls, lying in a hollow, as if sheltering from the wind. Forty yards farther on he came to three more bodies close together, two of them lying in water and slushy snow. These latter he pulled out on to the hard ice. He stated that all were dead and already stiff. This was about 3 miles below the Malte Brun hut, and about half a mile below the De la Bèche corner.[1] He then made for the Ball hut in more moderate weather, reaching it at 3.30 P.M. in a somewhat exhausted condition. Dr. Bradshaw immediately went down to the Hermitage with the fateful news.

The guide Michael Bowie and 6 other men happened to be at the Ball hut; they at once set out towards the scene of the disaster, where they arrived in about 1½ hrs.—fast going. They took blankets, lanterns and food. On arrival at the scene they went on about 150 yards beyond the first three bodies and found the body of Blomfield, upon which they attempted resuscitation, but without result. He had obviously given most of his clothing to the girls, and had apparently been starting back towards the Malte Brun hut to obtain help from Hilgendorf. His knees and hands evidenced the fact that he had been crawling against the gale. The weather was still so severe and the party of 7 so obviously too small to attempt the removal of the bodies, that all they could do was to wrap them in blankets and return to the Ball hut.

The next day (Monday, January 20) the N.W. gale was still raging, but a party of 33 men was gathered from the Hermitage, the Public Works Camp on the motor track now in construction to the Ball hut, and from the Ball hut. Taking stretchers, they set out to attempt the recovery of the bodies. This party met with a severe buffeting from the gale, and after strenuous endeavour managed to reach a point on the glacier about 1½ miles below where the bodies lay. Several members of this party had to be assisted back to the Ball hut, and it was stated they were fortunate not to lose some of their number. It was an heroic attempt, but many of the men were insufficiently clothed and unaccustomed to glacier travel.

I reached the Hermitage at 10 P.M. on the Monday night, doing the last part of the journey from Fairlie by service car, which had some trouble in getting through flooded creeks over the last 11 miles of the road.

On Tuesday morning the weather was still stormy, but looked like clearing, so with Vic Williams, the head guide in charge, we left the Hermitage at 9.45 A.M.—a party of 15, comprising 7 guides and 8 volunteers, mostly seasoned men used to glacier work. We reached the Ball hut at 11.50 A.M. and added one to our number

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[1] This spot is 2¼ miles in a direct line from the Malte Brun hut.

there, setting out up the glacier at 1.10 P.M., with lanterns in case of need. The weather was then improving, and got finer as we went on. No inconvenience was felt from occasional snow showers. The way lay down a steep descent of about 100 ft., and across the Ball Glacier, then on to the clear ice of the Hochstetter below the great icefall; up this glacier about 1½ miles, then across the great medial 'Rudolf' moraine on to the dry ice of the Tasman—roughish, but easy going to any practised walker. About 1 mile above the point where the Rudolf moraine is crossed, is located 'Pine Apple Rock' on another medial moraine of the main Tasman Glacier. Here there is a cache of timber and iron destined for the projected new Malte Brun hut. We reached this spot—about half-way to our objective—at 2.30 P.M. From there we proceeded up the clear ice of the Tasman, reaching the scene of the disaster at 3.45 P.M., or 2½ hrs. from the Ball hut. We could have done it faster, but were conserving our party's strength, which we knew would all be wanted on the sad return journey.

It was a pitiful sight, and stirred the emotions of the strongest men. The faces of the deceased were in repose, but were all more or less mottled (ecchymosis), a condition which is usual, I am informed, with cases of death by exposure to cold and wet. The backs of their hands and fingers showed abrasions, particularly in the cases of Miss Brown and Blomfield. Whether these abrasions were in consequence of contact with the ice before death, or possibly by hail after death, is a matter of conjecture.

The subsequent medical examination of the bodies revealed no injuries except a few small abrasions, and the knees of the guide alone showed traces of crawling. The medical opinion given was that they died from cold and exposure, and that there was no evidence of anything else whatever. The doctor was unable to give an opinion as to the length of time in which it is usual for a person to perish by exposure.

We reverently placed the bodies upon the stretchers, but soon found that carrying was out of the question, as the numerous crevasses and water holes were all hidden by about 6 inches of new snow through which the carriers were continually falling. We therefore improvised sledges of the stretchers with teams of 3 men to a load, and dragged our sad burdens down the glacier. Even then every man of the party had his turn at going into crevasses or water holes—indeed, one could not look down the line of sledges without seeing a man down. Some few of us who were wearing crampons were better off than others, as ordinary nailed boots slipped under the strain of pulling, whilst crampons gave a surer foothold. It was desperate work, and at every stoppage the improvised sledges froze to the surface and were hard to start again. After about 2 miles the snow thinned out and we were compelled to carry the bodies, amongst the ridges and hollows of the ice and occasionally on the thin moraine of rocks. After about 1 mile of

such carrying we reached ' Pine Apple Rock ' where the bodies were left decently covered with a tarpaulin from the timber dump. It was now 7 P.M. and we started on our return to the Ball hut for the night. About 1 mile below ' Pine Apple Rock ' we met Mr. Charles Elms, manager of the Hermitage, and Mr. D. McCormack, the head man of the Construction Camp, coming out with a supporting party of 14 men. Though darkness was coming on, this party and several of our own went back to ' Pine Apple Rock ' and brought all the bodies down another mile or more to the crossing-place in the Rudolf moraine. This large medial moraine lies between the clear ice of the Tasman and Hochstetter Glaciers (which here unite) and is about a quarter of a mile in width, rising to about 100 ft. above the clear ice on either side. The last of the carrying party came into the Ball hut at 10.30 P.M., and about 30 men slept there that night.

Next morning, Wednesday, January 22, a party of 23 men set our from the Ball hut at 4.45 A.M., and by dint of great exertion came in there with all the bodies by 8 A.M. A further carry of 3 miles—6 men to a stretcher—brought all to our waiting motors, 3 miles below the Ball hut, by 11 A.M., and we reached the Hermitage at noon. An inquest was held in the afternoon, the verdict being ' Death by exposure in an Alpine blizzard.'

Such in short is the history of this terribly sad fatality.

Since the inquest I have ascertained that the watch of my niece, Miss Doris Brown, was stopped by water at 12.49 P.M. Two other watches resisted the wet and showed 6 o'clock and 7.15 o'clock respectively. Apparently they had run down. It has also been revealed that some spare unused cardigan jackets were in the ladies' rucksacks.

In my own mind—after some 44 years of Alpine experience (during which I have been caught in many Alpine storms) and from a study of accidents reported in Alpine literature, I am disposed to attribute the very speedy deaths of the party to the effects of lightning, though the bodies showed no sign of burning. I understand this is not always the case. Severe lightning was observed in the vicinity of the disaster by parties at the Haast Memorial hut (7000 ft. up on the Mt. Cook route), from the Ball hut, and by the guide Hilgendorf, coming down from the Malte Brun hut, whose axe was hissing and spluttering to such an extent that he towed it behind him with straps rather than risk carrying it in his hand. The wet condition of their clothing would also be favourable to the conduction of electric fluid.[2] Subsequent researches of medical text-books tend to confirm

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[2] See, however, *A.J.* **38**, 97, where Mr. Smythe affirms on medical and scientific authority that his escape and that of his companions was due to the *soaked* condition of their clothing: ' . . . the electrical fluid naturally ran down my wet clothes in preference to my body.' But, personally, we think that Mr. Mannering's opinion is correct.—*Editor*.

the theory of death by lightning, especially as regards the early rigidity of the bodies and the accompanying ecchymosis.

No scrap of writing was found on any of the deceased, who were apparently overwhelmed suddenly. They were in the 'slushy area' of the glacier where the melting begins on the surface snow—two of the bodies being in water—but the wind was quite strong enough to have blown them there after death. With one exception the girls' clothing was inadequate to resist stormy weather conditions.

The obvious lesson to learn from this terrible affair is that the guides' regulations—or rather the lack of regulations at the Hermitage—are not what they should be. Neither is there sufficient precaution as to the clothing of parties. One young guide to four ladies, three of whom were quite inexperienced—even for a walk up the Tasman—is not sufficient.

The New Zealand Alpine Club is now endeavouring to get instituted regulations as to guiding, somewhat on the lines ruling in Switzerland, with a view to make the future safer for climbers and tourists. We have, so far, in New Zealand been singularly free from fatalities in the Tasman district. This is the only fatal accident since that of February 1914, when Mr. S. L. King with the guides Thomson and Richmond were killed by an avalanche on the Linda Glacier. No doubt freedom from accident has been due largely to the care exercised by the local guides; but the very absence of accidents has become a source of danger by lulling us into a sense of security and blinding us to the risks taken during the tourist season at Mount Cook Hermitage. Alpine accidents are traceable to bad weather conditions, and even such a simple walk as that up the Tasman Glacier may at any moment become positively dangerous in a 'New Zealand' storm.

With a view of minimizing the risk from bad weather on the Tasman Glacier, I would recommend the immediate building of two small shelter huts on skids—on the ice—weighted with rocks from the adjacent moraines. It would be useless to build such huts at De la Bêche Corner (near where the trouble occurred) or upon the rocks of the Malte Brun range, as both sides of the glacier are always heavily crevassed, and such refuge huts would be quite difficult to reach from the smoother ice always obtaining in the middle of the glacier, which is the route generally taken between the Ball and Malte Brun huts. Huts on the ice would not move down more than about 180 yds. annually, and could be levelled from time to time as required. These suggestions are being entertained by the Mount Cook Tourist Company.

Of the sorrow and grief arising out of this tragedy I make no attempt to write; no mere words can express my feelings.

G. E. Mannering.

Mr. A. P. Harper in commenting on this accident points out that the fact of Hilgendorf meeting the full force of the storm and only

taking 3½ hrs. from hut to hut, seems to indicate that though the storm was a very bad one, it was not unprecedently so—similar storms have been experienced by many N.Z. mountaineers in the past. It is, of course, possible that the severe thunderstorm may have in some way stunned the party, but even so, it is obvious that no party should have left the hut in the face of a Nor'wester *and in rain*, with such scant clothing. The fault, in Mr. Harper's opinion, lies in the want of proper systems, as it seems to be no one's responsibility[3] to overlook or advise travellers; otherwise it is unbelievable that the girls would have been allowed to go so unsuitably dressed—for even on a two-days' glacier trip, weather conditions may change so suddenly that emergency clothing should always be carried.

The young guide Blomfield (age 20), who perished, was amply qualified to conduct on such a simple expedition, but it is possible that in his short two seasons' experience he had never been in such a predicament, and familiarity with this hackneyed expedition may have made him fail to realize the risk of sudden bad weather—otherwise it is hard to imagine why he also was totally unprovided with suitable clothes. The fact that Hilgendorf, who was properly clothed, faced the same conditions without ill effects, seems to prove that inadequate clothing was responsible for the fatality.

[It remains to us to express the deep sympathy of the Alpine Club with our member Mr. Mannering and the relatives and friends of the young victims.—*Editor*, 'A.J.']

CANADIAN AND AMERICAN NOTES.

Glacier House in the Selkirks now Demolished.

Glacier House, on the Illecillewaet river in the Selkirks, ceased to exist about November 22 last, when the contractor, Mr. H. McHugh of Calgary, completed the wrecking of the old rambling wooden hotel. All lumber, doors, windows, pipes, radiators, stoves, and other fittings worth removing were shipped away by train, and fire was set to all rubbish left. The ground was completely cleared and the site left as near as possible as it was before the small hotel was built in 1887, as the Canadian Pacific Railway refreshment room, there being no dining-cars on the trains at that time. The old hotel at Field was opened about the same time for the same purpose.

During last July the old mountaineers attending the camp of the Alpine Club of Canada at Rogers Pass watched the wrecking of the dear old mountain home with sorrow. The many happy seasons

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[3] See *N.Z. A.J.*, No. 15, pp. 352–4.