

NEW ZEALAND NOTES, 1955-56

By DAVID HALL

THIS summer has been something of an *annus mirabilis*. It was phenomenally dry, cleaning-up rock routes to an unprecedented extent. The quality of the best climbs raised our standards to new heights, and visitors to this country made an important contribution to this tale of achievement. The number of peaks climbed did not in general exceed last year's tally, partly because the weather's complacency was patchy, partly because many routes need snow to produce viable conditions.

There were new routes done on both Cook and Tasman. Technique was advanced by a much more liberal use of pitons, on both rock and ice, and allied aids. Perhaps the most remarkable new phase of mountaineering was inaugurated by an intrepid pilot, Harry Wigley—a name long associated with the Hermitage. He landed his ski-shod Auster on the Olivine Ice Plateau and in two trips installed a party at a high level camp which would otherwise have taken four days or more to establish. Wigley also landed on the Fox névé to convey Hamilton's party to the Pioneer Hut.

While Tasman was neglected, Mount Cook received great attention, some fourteen parties climbing the High Peak and four the Low. All the known routes were climbed, except the Grand Traverse—in view of difficult ice conditions between the High and Middle Peaks. The hundredth ascent of the High Peak was made by the route of the original first ascent of December 1894. In December, H. J. Stevenson and B. J. Gillies climbed the South ridge to the Low Peak, varying both the previous routes on the most difficult portion. A party (D. G. Heron, R. Tornquist, H. P. Barcham and G. J. McCallum) early in January climbed a new rock spur on the Hooker face to reach the summit ridge a little north of the Middle Peak. The other new route was on the eastern side—an ascent of the North-east ridge. This is the bold rock rib flanking the Linda Glacier which eventually merges into Zurbriggen's ridge, and R. K. Irwin, P. Robinson and Hamish MacInnes (the two former are American, the latter Creagh Dhu transplanted) climbed it in February and found it of good quality. On top they met a guided party who had come up by Earle's route, the first time parties have actually met on the summit of Cook. The international party then descended Earle's route and spent a night out some three hours from the Empress Hut. (MacInnes in January had climbed Zurbriggen's route alone.) On the same day a third party (I. D. R.

Cresswell and W. G. Croll) climbed the East ridge ; they, too, were benighted, between the Middle and High Peaks, and bivouacked in a shelter dug in snow on the East face. Next day they gave up their attempt on the High Peak and descended to the Hooker.

J. N. Hamilton and W. K. A. Berry (who had carried out a strenuous reconnaissance a year before) returned to the unclimbed West Buttress of Tasman. First they climbed the virgin West Buttress of Lendenfeldt. They began the Tasman assault at 6 A.M. and climbed until 7 P.M., when they retraced their steps (or, should one say, rethreaded their pitons?) and descended to the bivouac site where they had dumped their rucksacks at 3 P.M. to pass a night tied on with rope. Their second day's reascent was aided by the ironmongery established the day before ; but although they began again at 5.45 A.M., it was 4 P.M. before they stood on the summit of Tasman, the last few hundred feet providing ice-climbing of a standard comparable to the rock which had engrossed most of their attention during both days. They regained the Pioneer Hut at 9.30 P.M.

There were two further new routes made in the Hermitage area. In December a party of four (G. J. Burrows, K. C. Wise, S. C. Gentry and W. G. Croll) climbed Nazomi from the south, over Pibrac. In February MacInnes and Irwin, with D. Dawe, solved an old problem by climbing the complete South ridge of Green.

These were fine climbs, in the main area in New Zealand where emulation is a noticeable feature. Competition has been transferred, even in the more remote areas, from the new peak to the new route. Even so, first ascents were made. Perhaps the most notable was the final conquest of the ' Black Tower ' (about 8,400 ft.), the Main Divide virgin between Hopkins and McKerrow, long the cynosure of ambitious eyes, and reputed to have repelled about fifteen separate assaults. The peak is a sinister spike of dark rock, which glowers down on the Hopkins and the Leblanc glaciers on either side of the range. It was climbed on December 30 over the long ridge from McKerrow by W. Romanes and B. H. Williams. Rather ironically, another party (M. J. P. Glasgow, J. L. Woodward, T. H. Scott and B. R. Young), still believing in the virginity of the objective, assailed it a few days later and reached the top over Hopkins by another long and difficult route.

In the Arrowsmiths in December B. L. Smith and J. G. Wilson traversed all four of the Spires (two previously unclimbed) and also climbed a new fifth summit further north. This party, with D. J. Elphick and M. R. White, also traversed Jagged, Upham and Tower Peaks, and made the first ascent of the North-east ridge of Evans.

In December also an unnamed peak on the eastern spurs of the Liebig Range was climbed from the little-visited Cass Valley. The zest for novelty extended even to the North Island, where small rock spikes

higher up the Pinnacle Ridge on Ruapehu were first climbed, and the Turtle, a 'feature' on the slopes of Egmont, was traversed for the first time. Egmont, incidentally, was the scene of a mass onslaught in January: in one day 167 persons reached its summit, the youngest of them aged nine.

Southland parties had further successes in the Sounds area, where rock-climbing problems reach a high order of difficulty and standards, mostly on good granite rock, are also high. M. D. Millar and W. I. Gordon climbed two unnamed virgins flanked by Milne and Patuki. L. E. Warburton, R. J. Cuthill and B. L. Wood, aided by an air drop, in February climbed two new summits in the remote Wick Mountains and discovered a new branch of the Joe River. In February also, G. Hall-Jones, D. Ryan and D. B. Wilson, made the first ascent of the very difficult South-west face of Mount Barrier.

With P. Robinson and R. K. Irwin in January, Warburton and Hall-Jones successfully surmounted the unclimbed South-east ridge of Tutoko, another very difficult route; they took in the virgin South-east summit as well as the northern peak before descending by their route of ascent. The two American visitors, Irwin and Robinson, with R. Rodda, also that month made a fine new climb on rock on Aspiring, the North Buttress.

In December, M. Gill accomplished alone the seventh ascent of Mitre Peak, overlooking Milford Sound; his companion did not go to the top. As they paddled back in the dark two miles across the fiord to the hotel, a school of porpoises buffeted their canoe—perhaps the first appearance of porpoises as a mountaineering hazard.

Cross-country journeys were not entirely neglected, although today they are undertaken less frequently than in the past. In December a Wellington party (R. E. Crawford, R. M. Coventry, D. Herd and T. G. Carter) made a strenuous trip from the Olivines, through difficult forest and mountain country, to the West Matukituki, reached by the Waipara Saddle after taking in an ascent of Mt. Buncombe. Carter returned in January to the Waipara with another party and made the first ascent of Eros from that valley.

In December, S. Conway, J. D. Pascoe, W. E. Hannah and R. Chapman entered the Landsborough by Broderick Pass, climbed Hooker, and went out to the west; their peregrinations included the McKerrow Glacier, the Twain River and the Karangaroa.

An Auckland University College party (with a few accretions from elsewhere) explored the unsurveyed peninsula between Doubtful Sound and Daggs Sound, making some interesting botanical and topographical discoveries.

The successes of the last two generations in completing the explorations of the pioneers have gradually tended to restrict the scope of new

ventures, although there is actually still plenty of new ground to be covered by anyone with the time for the necessary preliminary research. In the fullness of time, the cross country journey, with a peak or two as a frivolous diversion, may again come into its own as the most physically exacting but the most satisfying type of mountaineering we have to offer.