

NEW ZEALAND NOTES

BY NORMAN HARDIE

THE summer climbing in New Zealand followed the general trend which has been with us for several years. Climbers are increasing in numbers and new routes are becoming rare. Unfortunately the climbing year ended with the biggest mountaineering tragedy that this country has known and the death toll could have been much greater.

The Mount Cook area was very popular in the summer. There was an increase in activity further south with the most notable new routes being by H. Jacobs and M. Jones, who climbed Crosscut and Christina. I was in a party which made a new route on Mount Brewster.

Once again Japanese students were active here. An unusual aspect of the year was that no New Zealand expedition went overseas except to Antarctica.

In May the New Zealand Alpine Club celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary. During one weekend the Club fully occupied the Hermitage, the only hotel in the Mount Cook National Park. Perhaps the highlights of a very gay jubilee were the reading of messages from Sir John Hunt, Eric Shipton and H. E. L. Porter. While the good spirits lasted, a hat was taken round to collect substantial donations for a Sherpa clinic as part of Sir Edmund Hillary's next expedition.

One month later John Harrison was killed in a soft snow avalanche on a relatively easy and accessible mountain. Four men, two of whom had recently arrived from Britain (Mike Harper and Jeffery Wilby), began a winter climb of Rolleston on a fine day. Then very bad weather for four days plastered the area. On the second day a search party with face rescue winches moved on to the mountain. They were followed by a second party consisting of eight men who took over the first camp as the earlier group moved to a higher position.

The avalanche slid on to the camp of the second group at about 9 p.m. on their first night. Two men, Peter Squires and Ian Gardiner, in the least covered tent, had been partly protected by bulky radio equipment. They got out, uncovered the three men in the next tent and then had to dig down ten feet with their hands to my tent where John Wilson and I were found unconscious, but protected by the large frame pack at my head. Harrison, beside us, had no such protection and he made no response to artificial respiration.

The four men on the face were not positively seen by the searchers. On the fifth day a helicopter appeared as the weather cleared for the first

time. A lifeless rope was sighted from close range, disappearing under the snow in a steep couloir. The search was then abandoned and an attempt will be made in the spring to locate the bodies.

John Harrison was an outstanding artist, a renowned humorist, a capable administrator and a most sound and mature mountaineer. His New Zealand climbs included a broad selection of the main peaks, frequently by unorthodox routes. He was always in great demand for expeditions outside this country. He visited Antarctica twice and he went very high on Masherbrum and Makalu. His death gave the nation a severe jolt. His absence is felt deeply.