

Les Alpes (Review, Summer 1977, p 62) contains an account of an expedition to Spitzbergen by H. Nünlist. They went to a region in the NW of the island, near the Lilliehook Glacier, a previously unexplored area with permanent ice cover and a number of small peaks of 1000 to 1200m.

BRITISH ISLES

A review of the British rock-climbing scene covering the period 1974 to 1977 appears on p 227. *Mountain* has also carried some articles which summarize recent events and trends; 'Lakeland climbing in the seventies' by Rob Matheson (54 19) and 'Gogarth saga' by Alec Sharp (57 20). The latter is a history of the development of Craig Gogarth in Anglesey which began in earnest in 1964.

The subject of grading has been under discussion in the last year, it being felt in some quarters that some alterations are necessary to accommodate recent developments. *Crags* (5 14) suggests a new system of grading of extreme routes—this is an extension of the present system which it is felt does not cope with the variety of extreme routes being put up today. The basic idea is to divide the extreme grade into 5 sections; E1, E2 etc, higher numbers indicating greater difficulty. Some suggested examples are given from some of the major routes in the country in this issue of *Crags* and in subsequent ones. The Climbers' Club plans to use this system in its forthcoming Guides, and a table of gradings is published for comment in *Mountain* 57 36. Some changes in the same direction are taking place N of the border. The SMC has decided to split the VS grade into 2 categories, VS and HVS and a list of the main Scottish routes has been published in the *SMC Journal*. By and large, it appears that the VS grade is now in line with similar gradings elsewhere, whereas the HVS grading is more problematic.

In the past year, the vexed question of education in climbing has been much debated, and has focused on the status of the Mountain Leadership Certificate. On the one hand, the anti-educationalists feel that 'educational climbing' is a contradiction in terms; they think that essential aspects that characterize the sport are lost as a result of the close regulation implied, eg the elements of danger and the exercise of initiative and self-reliance. On the other hand, the educationalists feel that there is nothing new in the idea of teaching climbing and point out that in the past the majority of climbers underwent some 'educational' process, albeit often of an informal kind in their introduction to the sport. In this context, it has been felt that the MLC, as an obligatory qualification in many cases, is often a poor indication of competence to deal with emergency situations in the hills and mountains.

At the time of going to press (December 1977) the issue is still far from clear and the complex debate continues to arouse a considerable amount of passion in all parties. Blow-by-blow accounts of the progress of the affair are reported at regular intervals in the bi-monthly climbing press and it is impossible at this stage to predict what the outcome will be. When a final accommodation is reached, we hope to present an impartial version of the whole story. In the meantime we shall refrain from further comment.

In another context, the BMC has been criticized (*Crags* 6 31) for its slowness in acting for the climbing world in matters of access to areas such as Chapel Head Scar in the Lake District. *Crags* decided to publish their own guide to the cliff, which they had previously withheld while negotiations were taking place. They felt that it could not wait any longer and that climbers should pressurize the BMC to act more quickly on their behalf.

The following guide-books have been received:

Dartmoor Tony Moulam (West Col Productions, 1976, pp 68, map and diagrams, £2.50) This guide covers all the climbs within the National Park boundary and, whilst it is good to have an up-to-date version, the spaced-out format and large fancy capitals introducing the various sections give the impression that the book has had to be stretched to attain even 68 pages. A cheaper soft back version would appear more appropriate.

Dorset R. J. Crewe and R. L. M. Shepton (R. J. Crewe, 1977, pp 235, pictures and diagrams, £3.50) This is a revision and up-dating of the 1969 guide-book by R. C. White published by the Climbers' Club.

Climbers' guide-books to lesser crags are serious-minded books produced by enthusiastic and serious-minded young men. This one gives the impression of being too thorough, too lengthy for the comparative insignificance of the subject matter. The place never seems to

come to life, but indeed it is perhaps too much to expect that it would under this clinical treatment. It has been competently and carefully compiled and will be an indispensable companion to future climbers on these exacting sea-cliffs.

Climbs in the South-West 1 Wye Valley (Wintour's Leap/Symonds Yat West Cliffs), John Wilson and David Hope, pp 128; 2 Cheddar (Cheddar Gorge/Brean Down), Richard Broomhead, pp 96 (Cordee, Leicester, 1977, photographs, plans etc, £2.75) Here we have a new guide-book format the size of a paperback; the paperback structure should ensure fairly rapid disintegration in use. The texts are immaculately detailed, but there is not much for the beginner. Since almost all climbs are in the higher categories we must conclude that the easier routes of yesteryear are now looked upon as easy ways down.

We have had occasion before to remark on the variety of names given to rock-climbs. There is a wide selection here, among them some which are in decidedly bad taste. Even if the leaders of new routes lack proper responsibility in this matter, discrimination has to be exercised on their behalf by route recorders. Otherwise it will look as though we all approve.

Equipment and Technique 1977

T. M. Connor

The past year has seen the entry of a number of interesting new products into the equipment market and also the continued adoption of new materials in their construction. Unfortunately, it is also true that the trend to rising prices is still with us, as it is in virtually every other retail market. Although we are currently being assured that inflation is being got under control, this is certainly not obvious so far as climbing equipment is concerned where often large increases are the norm—a horrifying example is quoted in *Climber and Rambler* (June 1977, 60) of Ventile garments increasing in price from £30 plus to £50 plus in one leap.

This magazine has a regular feature on equipment written by Tom Waghorn which frequently gives detailed appraisals of new items which have appeared on the market. In addition, there was an interesting article on the Japanese scene by Paul Howcroft in the February issue (p 31). Climbing and hill walking are very popular in Japan—it is estimated that 12 million people are involved, so the potential market is enormous. It appears that so far as clothing, down equipment and tents are concerned, the Japanese rely on their own manufacture or on imports from SE Asia. However, hardware is a different story, and the Japanese tend to purchase high quality imports from Europe and the USA. They are apparently much influenced in these purchases by the image created by the names of famous climbers attached to particular brands of equipment. In the July issue (p 62), Dave Durkan gives a brief review of some recent introductions of new gear into Europe. Some items of interest mentioned are a new lightweight hollow karabiner by Salewa weighing only 43gm and having a 2000kg breaking strain, a new waterproof breathing fabric, apparently Gore-Tex, of which more below, a variety of chocks and nuts, and a new range of Stubai climbing tools. The axes have a newly developed plastic shaft which is light, resistant to cold and of high strength. In this connection, on the other side of the Atlantic, Lowe Alpine Systems have introduced a new style of ice-axe with a tubular pick; it is claimed that this fractures ice inside the tube while leaving ice around it virtually undisturbed.

An interesting recent development that has come about because of the scarcity and high price of good quality down (the large and increasing demand in Japan must be an important influence here) has been the appearance on the market of substitutes which attempt to rival the properties of the real article rather than being poor copies of it. An example is the 'Eskimo' sleeping bag (produced by Vista Thermal Products Ltd, a subsidiary of Mountain Equipment); this is made of VP 18, a synthetic deep pile fabric. Tests reported in *Climber and Rambler* (September 1977, p 45) are impressive. In addition to being constructed of a new insulating material, the bag is of an unusual design, being body-shaped, with a wide section at