

## SKI-MOUNTAINEERING IN NEW ZEALAND

BY COLIN W. WYATT

SKI-TOURING in New Zealand divides itself into two main sections: the North Island mountains, almost exclusively volcanic and in every respect totally dissimilar to the mountains of Europe, and the South Island mountains, which are very similar indeed to the glacier regions of the Alps, except in climate. These sections may again be subdivided into what can be called 'public' ski-ing on the one hand, *i.e.* areas directly accessible from hotels, accommodation houses, or public Alpine huts, and into 'private' ski-ing on the other, that is to say, areas solely accessible from privately owned huts belonging to various Ski Clubs in the neighbouring towns.

The 'private' sections fortunately consist only of lowland ski-ing easily reached by car from the plains, and although these districts can give excellent running as such, they afford very little scope for touring, all the best areas for which lie near the 'public' places.

New Zealand offers as fine ski-mountaineering as any country, but to enjoy it to the full and to reap the greatest benefit one must have more or less unlimited time. The 'insular' climate is exceedingly erratic and uncertain, the country being swept frequently by nor'-westers, the local equivalent to the *Föhn*, which last anything from three to six days and render it impossible to leave the huts. But indefinite weather such as we know it is rare; as a rule it is either obviously perfect, or equally obviously impossible. When planning a few weeks' touring on the glaciers it is never safe to gamble on more than an average of three fine days out of seven, and one must be prepared frequently to be obliged to possess one's soul in patience for days on end, waiting for the storm to break. But if your time is your own, I can imagine no finer country for winter expeditions. The glacier ski-ing is superb and the views unequalled, since from most of the main peaks one can look down to the waves breaking on the coast in the distance, while the huts are very comfortable and well stocked with provisions; moreover high Alpine conditions occur at 2000-3000 ft. lower than in the Alps. Also, owing to the humidity of the atmosphere the snow binds very rapidly and solidly, and the danger of snow avalanches is almost non-existent. In the Southern Alps the ski-ing is usually good—in the North Island it is as a rule too icy except in late spring, but there the utter strangeness of the mountains and country more than offsets this disadvantage.

Apart from two low-level ranges of snow hills, the Tararuas and Ruahines, N. of Wellington, which are accessible only from 'private' huts, the North Island offers four main mountains to the ski-runner—Tongariro, the active volcano Ngauruhoë, Ruapehu, and Mt. Egmont



(Taranaki). Of these, Ruapehu has by far the most varied country, apart from which it is also the highest, and is the only glacier-bearing mountain in the island. Scenically it is superb, rising as it does straight out of the plains at 3500 ft. to a height of 9175 ft., while the hot sulphur lake some two acres in area lying in the crater of the summit plateau, surrounded by the 200-ft. ice cliffs of the glacier nucleus, is a feature unique in the world.

By far the best ski-ing of my trip, ski-ing which was ski-mountaineering in the true sense of the term, took place in the Southern Alps. Unfortunately, I was very unlucky with the weather, and my original programme had to be curtailed sadly—the greatest disappointment of all lay in not being able to climb Mt. Tasman. For three days we waited storm-bound in the Chancellor hut on the Fox Glacier, and when the weather cleared I had but one day in hand, as I was due in Taranaki, and thus had to make a long day over the Pioneer Pass to the Hermitage in one trek.

The main backbone of the Southern Alps, known as the Divide, lies barely 12 miles from the West Coast, and is thus very easily affected by the weather and often under dense cloud when the mountain chains lying further E. or inland are quite clear. The highest peak in the Divide is Mt. Tasman, 11,475 ft., backed up by one other eleven-thousander and a large number of ten-thousanders. Mt. Cook, 12,349 ft., New Zealand's highest mountain, lies just to the E. of the Divide in a massif of its own, and consists of a very long backbone with two minor peaks of just under 12,000 ft., connected with the main summit by a knife-edged arête. I had also entertained hopes of climbing Cook, but while I was there, owing to the bad season, the rocks were so iced as to render it out of the question.

My first visit was to the Ball hut immediately after my arrival in July 1936, where I spent my time getting fit on the Ball Glacier, a fine if easy run lying in a sheltered position under the precipices of Mt. Cook, and which gave me perfect crystal-snow running on several occasions. Although a glacier, it is perfectly safe for unroped ski-ing, even by novices, and is an easy  $2\frac{1}{4}$ -hour climb to the peak of about 7600 ft. above the Ball Pass, which although low, commands one of the finest panoramas of the Alps, comprising five glaciers—the Tasman, Murchison, Hooker, Sealy, and Mueller—and of most of the main peaks of the Alps with the exception of Tasman. Apart from the districts which I explored, namely, the Tasman, Franz-Josef, and Fox Glaciers, there is superb work to be accomplished throughout the chain, notably on the Mueller, Murchison, Godley, and, though very inaccessible at present, the Rangitata and Rakaia Glaciers. The region I visited is the most easily accessible and best supplied with huts, and contains also the finest peaks in New Zealand, the only exception being Mt. Aspiring lying in an isolated massif far to the S.

My companion on the trip was the guide Mick Bowie, who apart from being absolutely first-rate as guide, was also a good ski-runner and the most perfect companion for such a trip under every condition.



Moreover, he is one of those people who thoroughly understand the mountains and love them for themselves alone. On our first day we set off early from the Ball hut (*bewirtschaftet*), laden with fresh bread, eggs, meat and other provisions, our destination being the Malte Brun hut at 5700 ft., destined to be our base for the first period. Our route lay up the Tasman Glacier, the largest in New Zealand and larger than any in Europe; it took us, loaded as we were, the best part of 5 hours to reach the hut. Fortunately the going was very easy and gradual, and the glorious façade of peaks and hanging glaciers on both sides prevented it from becoming tedious. We passed at the foot of Cook and Tasman, across the face of the impassable Hochstetter icefall. Ahead of us lay the massif of the Minarets with the head of the glacier lying hidden to the right. As we turned the corner the vast névé of the Tasman lay before us, with the red rocks of Malte Brun, 10,421 ft.—the Matterhorn of New Zealand—on our right, and to the left the immense cascading glaciers of the Minarets, the background consisting of the huge mass of Elie de Beaumont, 10,200 ft., together with the lovely ski-ing slopes of the Hochstetter Dome, 9258 ft. We were cutting tracks in perfect if rather heavy new snow, and I was all impatience to set foot on the limitless expanse of ski-country ahead—country rivalled only by the Ebnefluh area in the Oberland.

The next day dawned fine and we set off further up the Tasman to the Hochstetter Dome. Leaving the hut at 7.45 A.M., our way lay up the foot of the last slope to the Lendenfeld Saddle at the base of Elie de Beaumont, where the rising clouds coming over the Divide from the coast overtook us, so that on reaching the summit on ski at 12.15, we were enveloped entirely in cloud. We sat and had a snack, and then the clouds began to lift and a wonderful vista opened up right down the Tasman to Mt. Cook towering majestically in the centre. The run down was superb—huge open slopes of all angles where one could run as one pleased—culminating after several glorious swoops in one straight course of over a mile in length. We returned to the hut at 2 P.M. after as fine a day's ski-ing as I have ever had, and sat sun-bathing outside the hut door till late, studying the fascinating maze of glacier and icefall on the face of the Minarets opposite. I knew we should eventually be making our way up through those icefalls on our way over to the coast, and amused myself trying to pick out the best route.

Next morning we set out for Hamilton, 9915 ft., and had very hard work cutting tracks up the Darwin Glacier, but on reaching the foot of the steep part of the climb clouds again came up, this time so threateningly that we decided to renounce Hamilton and instead climbed the Bonney Glacier to the foot of the precipices of Malte Brun. Here we crossed a col at about 7700 ft., finding ourselves faced with 1000 feet of the steepest slope I have ever dared to ski down; it was very slabby, and had I been alone I should never have approached it on ski, but Mick assured me that it had never been known to avalanche and we duly descended in safety. We had a very



interesting run back, arriving directly on top of the hut and thus avoiding the 20 minutes' climb up the moraine of the Tasman, the anticlimax to most of our trips here. I was then still not accustomed to New Zealand conditions, and had not become used to the fact that slopes which would be dangerous at home are perfectly safe here and frozen throughout.

For the next two days the storm raged round the hut. The morning of the third day showed a perfect dawn, however, with a nice covering of new snow, so Mick and I set off jubilantly at 5 A.M. for Elie de Beaumont. We had big ideas to-day, for we knew that the western peak of the Elie massif, Wilczek Peak, 10,022 ft., had never been climbed although much sought after, and we nursed an inward hope that we might be able to climb it should we be favoured with a windstill day. We arrived at the foot of the Lendenfeld Saddle at 6.30, and never have I seen such a wonderful sunrise. It was still dark when we left, and we had scrambled down the moraine with a lantern, but as we plodded up the centre of the huge glacier we watched the first touch of crimson dye the ice-cap of Mt. Cook. One by one the other giants sprang to life in a blood-red glow and slowly the wave spread lower down the ice, gradually brightening into a blaze of golden glory which in turn paled to an exquisite primrose, finally dissolving into the dazzling whiteness of a perfect day.

Slowly we zigzagged up to the first big icefall, winding our way among the huge crevasses until we came to one which spread right across the face. Fortunately there was one good bridge which we crossed, and continued up further beautiful slopes to the broad terrace below the second icefall. Here we thanked our stars that the storm had delayed us, for from the Dome we had seen this slope clear, while now it was laid waste for a width of 50 yards by a huge ice avalanche stretching right across it in a jumble of great blue blocks with the snout disappearing into our big crevasse. With great difficulty we picked our way across it on ski, right underneath the overhanging smooth blue wall from which the mass had broken away, the ice being scoured out in places like butter scooped with a spoon. Beyond this obstacle we climbed up a steep snow slope, finally finding our way blocked for good by a huge, almost vertical sérac of green ice. No other route was possible, so we were reluctantly forced to abandon ski and don crampons for the serious work lying beyond. We spent some time cutting steps up this for about 30 ft., the ice being very hard. We then found easier going through the remainder of the icefall until we emerged on the long steep snow slope leading over a small bergschrund to the summit. The summit, attained at 10.15, proved to be a large flat area where we strolled about admiring the view, my only disappointment being that a dense layer of cloud covered the foothills of the West Coast and the sea, the main glacier névés and a few isolated peaks alone appearing.

We had arrived at the top in  $5\frac{1}{4}$  hours of comfortable going, and were lucky enough to have picked an absolutely windstill day for



this glorious viewpoint. We sat down and consumed a very welcome lunch while studying the knife-edged arête of Wilczek Peak<sup>1</sup> stretching out away from us to the W. Given the conditions and the total lack of wind, it looked a reasonably straightforward proposition apart from one very steep break in the arête with a narrow ridge of iced rock at the end of it. We left the summit of Elie at 10.45, and walked down some 300 ft. to the commencement of the ridge. The first 300 yards or so were merely a straightforward piece of tight-rope walking over two 50-ft. humps, the new snow giving excellent foothold. The steep face, some 25 ft. high, that we had studied from Elie, was quite easy to cut up, but the piece of rock we had seen proved to be badly iced, very narrow, and rather rotten; it stretched away before us for some 10 ft., and was by far the most difficult piece on the whole climb. It fell sheer away to the S., and had some very steep snow below it to the N., which by that hour had become wet, slippery and untrustworthy. Having negotiated the rock and its subsequent ridge, we encountered a long edge very sheer on both sides along which we straddled, the snow, on a fairly sound foundation, being dry and powdery on the S. slope but wet and untrustworthy on the N. After this came a fairly steep drop in the arête, down which we cut, then another narrow horizontal piece, followed by a further 30-ft. drop to a 4-ft.-wide notch, preceded by a substantial cornice, so that we had to cut down the face a few feet to avoid it. The going now was easier, the face flattening out a little for its last few feet to the ridge, so that we were able to walk along just below the edge with little cutting. After traversing a further hump we came to another little flat depression at the foot of the final slope of the summit. I say summit, although I am not at all sure which point on the ridge is actually Wilczek. The point that we reached at noon was some 20 ft. higher than the last point of the ridge, although on looking back we had the impression that the point formed by our unpleasant piece of rock early on in the climb was if anything higher. When studying the ridge at right angles from the summit of the Minarets a week later I was unable to tell which of the two tops was the higher, but was inclined to give the final one the benefit of the doubt. From this peak a steep 40-ft. drop in two steps, very sheer on one side, led to a large flat depression, from which a broad and easy snow face some 10 ft. wide led up to the final peak of the ridge, flat on top and commanding a superb view on three sides. Below it the ridge dropped away steeply in a series of buttresses of rock and ice to the impassable Callery gorge. We rested but a minute or two and then retraced our steps,

<sup>1</sup> See *A. J.* 43. 82; 48. 357-8 and especially 405. The peak of which Mr. Wyatt made the first ascent is the isolated W. peak of Elie de Beaumont, now universally known in N.Z. as Wilczek Peak of over 10,000 ft. in height. . . . 'The peak 9968 ft. is, I gather, quite isolated from the E. de B. massif, and I do not recollect seeing any peak of that height to the N. of Elie, unless it be something a long way off on the ridge running towards the Wataroa valley. . . . It would not be a practical way of climbing it to go over E. de B. first as we did for our, W., peak. . . .'



arriving at the foot of Elie's peak at 1 P.M. We had some trouble negotiating our rock, from which a large piece broke away under me and disappeared into the abyss. We were very fortunate in the conditions, since a slight wind would make the ridge very unpleasant, while a gale might render it impossible. Also, I should imagine that at any other time of the year it would consist almost entirely of ice and rock spikes and slabs, lying as it does completely exposed to all winds and weathers. It will, I expect, be a long time before it is climbed from the W.,<sup>2</sup> since in winter it would be impossible to bivouac in the snow owing to the humidity of the atmosphere. In summer, until a hut is built somewhere by the Mackay Rocks on the Franz-Josef Glacier, it is a very long and arduous trek up from the Almer hut across the Franz-Josef névé and over its northern lip down the icefalls of the Spencer Glacier to the foot of the ridge. It would take some time to find a suitable spot for a bivouac, and also the best means of access to the lowest spur which is very much broken up with ice gullies and rock ribs. The route up the Callery gorge entails two or three days' hard work through almost impassable bush in a narrow ravine, with similar troubles in reaching the lower spur.

Having returned to our rucksacks on the summit of Elie, we rested till 2 P.M. and then strolled around the broad top, very loath to pack up and depart. The descent was just a walk except for the short series of steps cut in the sérac after leaving our skis. We were glad to put these on for the run home, where after some careful progress through the débris of the ice avalanche and over the bridge of the big crevasse in the first icefall, we had a glorious fast run down to the Lendenfeld Saddle, which we reached at 2.45. Here the sun was so strong that we stripped to the waist, played about for a while, then ran all the way home in our shirts, reaching the hut at 4 P.M. The run down the saddle was unequalled—vast undulating slopes of beautiful snow where the skis almost turned and swung of their own accord, and here and there long straight progress which only stopped when one's legs became too cramped from 'standing still' for so long. Instead of a 3-hour tramp in gruelling heat we had a smooth half-hour's run with a cooling breeze, and I thought with pity of the Otago mountaineer who told me that for a climber to use skis was 'prostituting the mountains'! There can be few places where in one day one can get so much pleasure from real climbing pure and simple, with similar ski-ing, not to mention the middle part of the expedition where both merged into one.

Next day we left the hut at 5.50 A.M. for Hamilton, but before reaching the point where the Darwin Glacier runs into the Tasman,

<sup>2</sup> Since the above was written, Wilczek and Elie de Beaumont were traversed from the W. on December 25, 1936, by Mr. D. A. Carty with the Waiho guide, J. Cox. They bivouacked on the ridge between the Scenter and Burton Glaciers. Leaving the bivouac at 04.45, they climbed Wilczek by the N.W. face, passed over that summit and attained Elie de Beaumont at 14.30. The Malte Brun hut was reached over the Tasman Glacier at 21.15.—*Editor*.



clouds were beginning to seep over from the West Coast, and the prospects did not look so good. We mounted the Darwin Glacier and then turned off to the right up the Bonney, until we came to the foot of the cliffs of Hamilton nearest to Mt. Malte Brun. Here we encountered a steep 1000 ft. of frozen snow traversing upwards to the left in order to reach a depression halfway up Hamilton above the huge buttress thrusting out over the Darwin Glacier, from which an unnamed glacier plunges steeply down to join the Darwin at the foot of Mt. Häckel. This slope was so icy that we had to put on crampons and carry ski up it, the last few hundred feet to the depression being very tedious since we were breaking through wind-crust to a depth of a foot at each step. We had hoped to make the first ski ascent of Hamilton, but when we arrived at the depression and had looked up the steep snow slopes culminating in a narrow, icy couloir immediately below the flattish broad summit-ridge, we found to our disappointment that the snow was blown into great waves and slabs and quite unskiable. Reluctantly we stuck our skis in the snow and continued on crampons, reaching the summit at 10.30 in rather a strong wind, added to which clouds were now rapidly sweeping across the Divide and were already enveloping Annan. Accordingly, after a short rest and some photography, we retraced our steps to our ski. From the summit we obtained a most impressive view of the towering mass of Mt. Malte Brun, heavily covered with snow and ice, while to the N. and E. the whole of the Murchison Glacier and its surrounding peaks and upper snow-fields lay spread out before us. I was amazed at the superb ski-ing country disclosed, including several mountains that looked good ski climbs. I quite fail to comprehend why no hut has as yet been built to open up this area; one erected on, say, Cooper's Mate should be a very practical proposition, and would open up an enormous ski-mountaineering area, not to mention a fine series of climbs on the E. side of the Malte Brun range. A hut would facilitate also the trip from the Godley Glacier to the Tasman *via* the Classen and Tasman Saddles, at present requiring a very long day and necessitating fine weather conditions.

Duly collecting our ski, we had a most enjoyable run on good spring snow down to the head of the Darwin Glacier, which we reached at 11.30. By now the clouds had hidden the sun, so we pushed on down in a series of glorious runs to the hut, where we arrived at 12.30. Here followed a council of war: we were short of fresh food owing to our various enforced delays, so with a falling glass and the outlook definitely bad, we decided to return to the Ball hut for the night and for fresh provisions. Leaving most of our gear behind, we had a fine though flat run down to the Ball in a little over 1½ hour, a very different story from the 5-hour plod up we had had on our first day. It was very pleasant to be in a warm hut once more, but I was apprehensive lest the always temperamental weather should suddenly decide to clear up and so lose us a good day. Accordingly, in spite of a heavy storm we could see near De la Bèche corner, we left at 1.30 P.M. next



day and battled back to Malte Brun in the teeth of a howling gale with driving rain blowing in our faces—altogether the foulest trip I have ever had. We were most thankful to get to shelter in our old home once more.

The whole of Tuesday was spent indoors, with the hut creaking in the storm; we went to bed in despondency but none the less with our alarm clock set for 3.30 A.M. in case any change should occur. At 3.30 the night was still bad, although the wind had abated, so we went back to our blankets, having set the alarm for 5.30. When it went off this time the day had arrived and was certainly better, but the clouds on the Divide did not look good enough to warrant our setting off up the Minarets. We took a very leisurely breakfast, but suddenly realized that the clouds had gone and that it was rapidly becoming a beautiful day. We hastily gathered ourselves together and after a moment's consultation decided to make for Annan *via* the glacier at the head of the Darwin, which we knew had never been climbed. We got away at 8.10—much too late for comfort—but fortunately once we had reached the head of the Darwin Glacier and had begun the climb up through the icefalls of the new glacier, we reached in some 2 hours the shadow cast by the ice walls of Mt. Darwin towering above us to our left. On our right rose the rock precipices of Mt. Häckel; our glacier, though steep, proved to be easier than expected, although at one place where we came out above an overhang on to a 600-ft. slope of  $35^{\circ}$ , down which an avalanche had come earlier in the season, we realized that it was a spot where one would have to be very careful during the first part of the winter. At noon we reached the saddle between Annan and Häckel, looking down into the Murchison. We then skied on to the left over wind-slab and ice until a steep ice slope some 150 ft. high precluded all further progress on ski. These latter were carefully moored with our rucksacks and we then set off on a long bit of step-cutting up to the foot of the 150 ft. of rock leading to the summit. The sun was just about to rise over the summit and, in places where the beams were shining parallel to the slope, barely a foot above it, the effect of the light on the fragments of ice as each step was cut, resembled a fountain of diamonds gushing with each stroke of the axe.

The last few feet of rock, though badly iced, were comparatively easy, and we reached the summit at 12.40, a narrow rock ridge covered in powder snow. There was no breath of wind; before us the whole head basin of the Tasman lay spread, with the Tasman Saddle almost at our feet. For the first time I was really able to appreciate the enormous size of that glacier. Immediately opposite to us was the sharp snow peak of Aylmer, whence a lovely ski-run descended; next to it rose the double hump of the Hochstetter Dome, while dominating everything to the W. rose the beautiful massif of Elie de Beaumont with wonderful shadows on its icy walls, gleaming with a soft lustre like a pearl on the lip of its parent shell.

For a long while we sat there in silent admiration, returning to our



packs shortly before 2 P.M. From the col we had one of the finest steep and broken runs I had hitherto found, mostly on perfect, light powder snow in and out of the crevasses and gullies of the glacier. It ended with a long straight of a good 2 miles from the foot of our glacier, down the Darwin, almost to the moraine below the Malte Brun hut. Apart from the sheer joy of the descent, skis again proved their utility in time-saving and labour-saving. It took us but 40 minutes to run from the saddle between Annan and Häckel at about 9000 ft. to the foot of the moraine immediately below the hut, at 5500 ft. Moreover, we were going slowly and peacefully. Back in the hut we boiled our billy and sipped our tea with a glow of satisfaction, for not only had we had superb ski-ing, a nice little climb with a wonderful view, but we had made an ascent by a new route, being the fifth party to reach the top of Annan.

Now began the blackest period of the trip. The storm returned again overnight and for 5 days we were weather-bound in the hut, rising every morning at 3.30 in case it cleared and always returning to bed as we heard the wind howling without. The sixth night loomed better, with morning disclosing a brilliant starlit sky. We hastily breakfasted by candlelight and set off in the twilight at 5.15 for the Minarets. Our way lay straight across the Tasman in front of the hut to the foot of the mighty ice face of the Minarets, up which our route lay. We then bore slightly to the N. up through a maze of icefalls and crevasses magically opening out before us. So great had been the deception in scale from the hut windows, and so much further away was the mountain than it appeared, that what we had thought an intricate icefall turned out to consist of beautiful stretches of powder snow between gigantic crevasses, where the bridges were so huge that one did not realize that one was on anything but a slope between two chasms. The climb was most impressive, passing as we were through huge ice cliffs and crevasses, with the great hanging glacier of the highest Minaret ahead of us and the beautiful panorama of the Malte Brun range spread out behind. Progress was a bit heavy, for the storm had left almost 2 ft. of powder snow behind it, which here at any rate had not been blown sufficiently to crust it. The average gradient of the 4500-ft. ascent was but  $25^{\circ}$ , although appearing almost vertical from the hut. We debouched on the plateau between Mt. De la Bèche and the Minarets in about 4 hours after crossing the bergschrund by a 100-yard-wide bridge. We arrived at the saddle between the peaks at 9.45 A.M., with an icy wind blowing in a belt extending about 200 ft. round the Minarets. Fortunately the summit of the highest Minaret was just about 10 ft. above the wind-limit, so that we were able to sit and bask on the top and marvel at the view, perhaps one of the most incredible in the world. We stood on one of the higher peaks of the main Divide, with Elie de Beaumont to the N. and Mt. Tasman to the S. Before us spread the névés of the Franz-Josef and Spencer Glaciers, with range upon range of hills ever decreasing in height and gradually turning from white to green, when they merged



into the coastal belt of bush where gleamed the waters of Lake Mapourika, finally culminating in the white hairline of surf breaking on the shores of the Tasman Sea 15 miles away and 10,000 ft. below. To the E. range upon range of peaks disappeared into the distance. I was fascinated by the sight of the ocean seemingly at the foot of my mountain of everlasting ice—so unreal and magical was the effect.

At last I tore myself away and we descended into the wind, crossed the saddle and ascended the lesser Minaret, which rose like an island at the head of the ice-sea of the Franz-Josef Glacier. Nearly 12 square miles of glacier snowfield lay beneath us at 8000 ft. All around rose up peaks of from 9000 to 10,000 ft. from a snowfield in which one could ski for days on end and never cover the same ground twice.

We had lunch on the plateau in front of Mt. De la Bèche, round whose rocks the wind-belt was roaring, and then skied down across it and round the E. side of De la Bèche until we came to a very steep ice couloir behind the peak. Down this we had to cut for 400 ft., with skis and sticks tied across our packs. Progress was precarious, for at every other step the ends would catch on the steep slope above us; we then crossed the head of the Rudolf Glacier, traversing under the cliffs of De la Bèche round to Graham's Saddle. We reached this at noon, and set off down the Franz-Josef in a long series of gentle runs, out across the almost level mile in the centre, past the Mackay Rocks, a most ideal site for a high-level hut, and so on down until we espied the head of the main icefall flowing into the mile-wide gorge between mountain walls like the head of a frozen Niagara. We skirted round the edge of this and on to the huge ledge, 1000 ft. above the icefall, on which is situated the Almer hut. We had intended spending the night here and doing a minor ski-tour such as Mildred Peak the next day, then down to Waiho, but on coming to the spot where the hut should have been, not a trace could we find, so deep was the snow; in fact it must have been buried some 30 ft. down. Fortunately we had had an idea that such might be the case, and since it was but 1 P.M., we had plenty of time in hand for the descent to Waiho before dusk.

The Franz-Josef is probably the most amazing glacier in the world, descending as it does through a deep gorge with mountain peaks rising 5000–6000 ft. on either hand, from the region of perpetual ice at 8000 ft. to dense semi-tropical bush at barely 700 ft. above sea level. From where we stood this huge sinuous tongue of fantastically broken ice, furrowed with countless crevasses, wound its way steeply down in huge cascades between the rocky cliffs. It disappeared round the corner, some 3000 ft. or more below, and vanished 3 miles away into a gorge whose flanks were deeply covered in rich bush. Further away again spreads the estuary of the Waiho river, with the line of ocean surf.

We skied on down for some 300 ft., when a 1000-ft. gully of very sticky new snow on an ice basis made ski-ing far too dangerous, as one slip would have shot one down into the yawning crevasses below. We had to put on crampons—which balled at every other step—and





*Photo, C. W. Wyatt.]*

GIRDLESTONE PEAK FROM RUAPEHU.



*Photo, C. W. Wyatt.]*

ICE FORMATIONS ON CRATER OF NGAURUHOË.

*[To face p. 96.]*





*Photo, C. W. Wyatt.]*

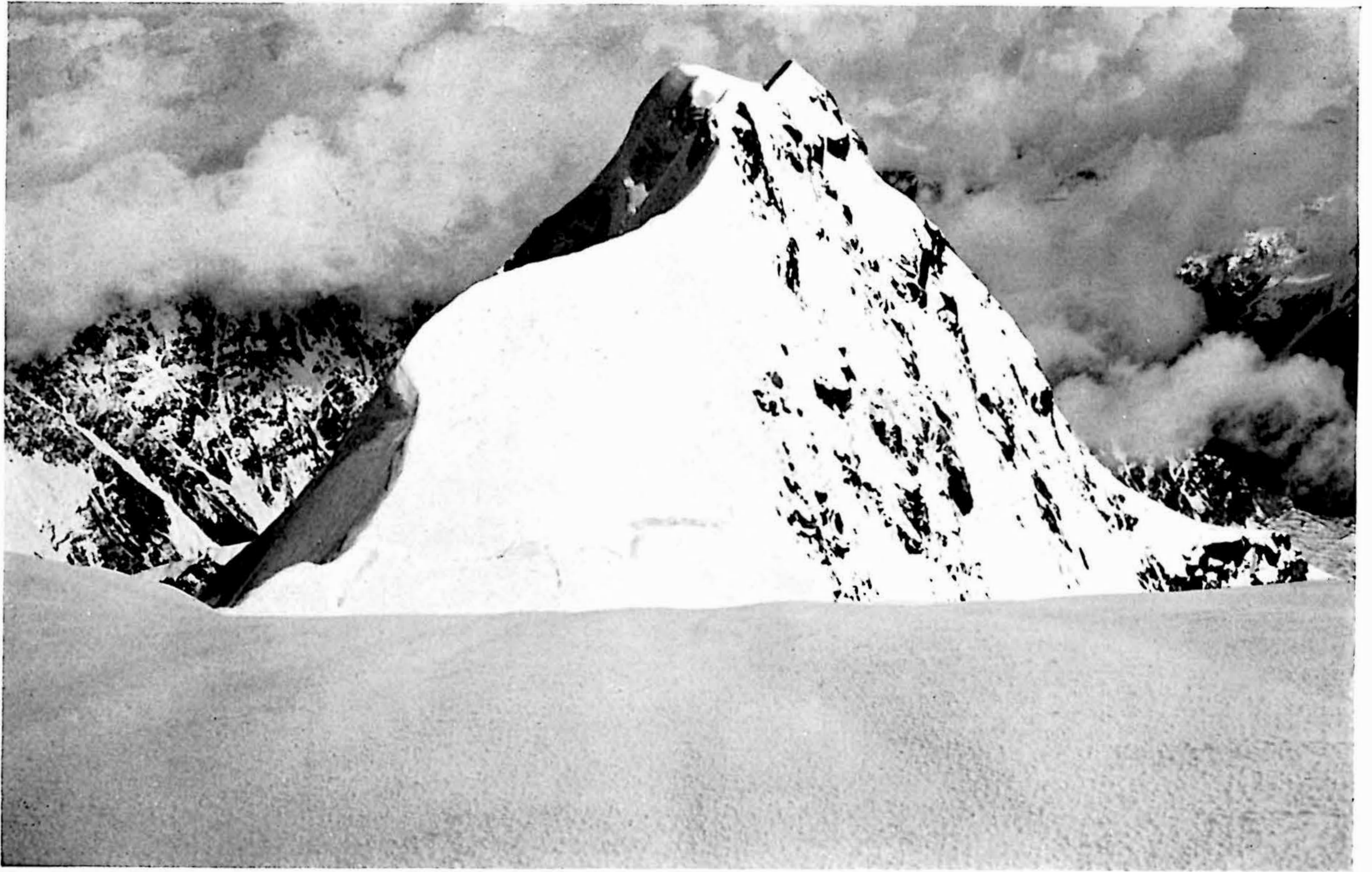
ICE ON RUAPEHU SUMMIT.



*Photo, C. W. Wyatt.]*

S. CRATER OF TONGARIRO FROM NGAURUHOË.





*Photo, H. E. L. Porter.]*

WILCZEK PEAK FROM JUST BELOW SUMMIT OF ELIE DE BEAUMONT.





*Photo, C. W. Wyall.]*

DESCENDING W. ARÊTE OF WILCZEK PEAK.

*To face p. 97.*



slow goose-stepping led us down to the point where the Almer Glacier merges into the Franz-Josef in a tumultuous labyrinth of towering séracs and yawning crevasses. We picked our way through these, walking along precarious ridges and over narrow bridges, until we reached a long 'arterial road' of comparatively unbroken snow near the middle of the glacier. Down this we skied again, mostly open running, but with 500 ft. of very tricky icefall in the middle, where the much-abused 'lifted-stem' proved our sole salvation, until opposite the Defiance hut where a screaming kea, flaunting his vermilion plumage overhead, welcomed us to the West Coast.

At about 500 ft. below the Defiance at 2.30 P.M., the snow gave out. We had to take off our ski and don crampons for the final 3 miles of bare blue ice. Never have I seen such a labyrinth of huge 50-ft. ice pinnacles, towering blocks the size of houses, and yawning abysses; twice we were blocked by the sheer ice precipice and had laboriously to retrace our steps or cut up some glazed face to see if a route through lay on the far side of a block. We came to the snout of the glacier at 3.30 P.M., to be confronted with a semicircle of deep, green jungle, into which we plunged. At once we came into another world—all around us towered vast tree-ferns, and overhead the sinister moss-covered trees were woven fast together by long creepers and lianas, while bell-birds chimed and the air was scented with nectar. For miles we strode through this green tunnel, occasionally getting glimpses back at the gleaming snout of the glacier, the magic thought of beer lending wings to our jaded feet. Suddenly we came out on to the main S. road, and at 4.30, much to the amazement of the hotel guests, two unshaven and dirty men unloaded their skis and packs on the hotel veranda and rushed to the bar.

Alec Graham, the owner of the Glacier Hotel at Waiho, gave us the most hospitable welcome, our slightest wish was fulfilled and generally anticipated, so that we began to feel like visiting royalty. Next day we took 'off,' as it was rather overcast and we were a bit tired. Alec Graham drove us all round the district in his car, and down to the beach, telling us stories of the old gold-rush days of the 'sixties which brought so much adventure to this coast. Instead of our taking the late afternoon 'bus down to Weheka as we had intended, he offered to drive us down beyond it to near the foot of the Fox Glacier at the crack of dawn on the morrow. So we spent the night at Waiho again instead of at Weheka, which was far more comfortable, and next day, in the early morning with a brilliant blue sky, drove the 18 miles of hilly road through towering trees to the beginning of the track leading to the Fox. I was sorry to leave Waiho, for seldom have I found a hotel which, apart from being thoroughly efficient and helpful to the mountaineer, enjoyed such a sympathetic atmosphere.

The journey up the Fox Glacier to the Chancellor hut was very similar to the Franz-Josef, starting with a track up through the dense jungle of tree-ferns and moss-covered trees, then over bare ice followed by a short piece on ski, and ending with a very steep scramble up a



1000-ft. slope of bushes, rocks and old avalanches to the terrace on a cliff above the icefall on which lies the hut. Taking our time since we had all day in which to climb and it was very hot, we reached the hut in 6 hours. The Fox Glacier, though very imposing, has not the grandeur and austerity of the Franz-Josef. It was wider, flatter and less broken except just in one short icefall, but it struck me as being the easiest way up into the Fox and Franz-Josef snowfields, while the latter is the best way down. The Chancellor hut was very comfortable, which we much appreciated as we promptly became storm-bound there for three days on end. My time was getting short, since I had to be at Taranaki on a definite date; also I was becoming worried, for both I and Mick badly wanted to climb Tasman, and if the weather broke we could not. When finally it cleared I had but two days in hand, and our last day, which started so fine, soon clouded over with the worst nor'wester clouds I have ever seen. To our regret we had to go out for our lives to attain the Hermitage in one day before the weather broke and marooned us on the wrong side of the Divide. We left the Chancellor by moonlight at 5.15 A.M., summer time having come in while we were at Waiho, climbed up the Chancellor Ridge to the edge of the Fox basin, reaching the latter as dawn broke. A wonderful expanse of ski-ing country lay revealed, with every type of run, while the great mass of Mt. Tasman, 11,475 ft., dominated everything with its huge rock and ice faces towering 3000 ft. above the snowfield. We traversed round below the Chancellor Dome, from which two beautiful, easy runs can be had, and looked down from the foot of Bismarck Peaks on to the Victoria Glacier and the Victoria Range to the W. of it. Here again lay a number of fine tours which have never been done. We then skied on over wonderful slopes to the Pioneer, the highest hut in New Zealand, situated on Pioneer Ridge at 8000 ft., and giving access to some of the finest climbs in the country. It is very small, has no windows and holds but four persons, and is therefore no place in which to become storm-bound. North of us rose Mts. Halcombe and Von Bülow, both skiable, and E. of them lies the Newton Pass leading over into the Franz-Josef. One could spend weeks with advantage in these two basins, ski-ing and climbing; it is an area especially suitable to the ski-mountaineer, but one which would appeal equally well to the climber pure and simple or to the ski-runner to whom crampons and axe are anathema. We had had hopes of climbing Mt. Lendenfeld, 10,500 ft. on our way, but from 9000 ft. upwards a howling hurricane was blowing, rendering all peaks out of the question. The roaring of the wind in the rocks of Mt. Haast was like surf on cliff in a storm, and we could see great whirlwinds of snow sweeping round in Pioneer Pass that we had to cross. We reached the Pioneer bivouac at 8.45 A.M., and attained the top of the Pass at 10.15. The weather appeared so threatening that our one thought was to cross the pass and attain the safety of the Tasman Glacier as quickly as possible. The last 100 ft. of the pass were completely glazed with ice, the rocks on either



side having a coating an inch thick, so we realized that rock climbs were out of the question for some weeks. The wind on the top was frightful; snow drove into our faces, our fingers froze while strapping our skis to our packs and putting on crampons. The first 100 ft. over the edge were very steep, but nice and soft, so after some care in negotiating a huge bergschrund under a 20-ft. cornice which looked very ominous, we sat down and slid until we were off the steep slope and out of the wind. The prospect ahead looked most awe-inspiring, huge hanging glaciers under which lay a narrow belt of wind-slab at  $30^\circ$  with a 200-ft. overhang beneath into the Haast Glacier, ending in what looked like a minor precipice. We skied down over a nice easy basin to the edge of this horrible strip of wind-slab, but while I was studying it unhappily, Mick shot across to the rock wall on the far end. Although I was becoming accustomed to New Zealand avalanche conditions, I didn't like the look of it at all and felt very doubtful if it would stand the strain of two sets of tracks. I endeavoured to run in Mick's tracks, but got up too much speed and, since a fall would have been fatal, I unwillingly cut a second set, started a small slabslide halfway over and reached the far side under the rocks with a sigh of relief. We were now on top of a  $38^\circ$  couloir with a slight ledge beneath and then a blank drop into space, rather like the top of a super-monster ski jump tilted up an extra  $10^\circ$  and with no landing ground below it. We took off our skis, sank up to our knees in wind-slab, put on crampons and gingerly made our way straight down this, breaking off slabs at each step which shot away ahead. After 200 ft. we were able to cut off to the right under a spur and came out on a big broad terrace where we put on our ski again. We came over the end of this on to another steep slope, but with a huge flat outrun; as it was decidedly a nasty slab we again took off ski and slid down sitting, to near the bottom where we again resumed them. We were now on a broad outcrop of terra firma between the Haast and Freshfield Glaciers leading right down to the moraine of the Tasman with no ice on it at all. It lay at about  $25-30^\circ$  and was covered with perfect spring snow. The slope was but 200 yards wide and descended for some 2000 ft. with a small but easily skiable couloir in the middle. We rushed down in consecutive 'christianias,' came out with a long run to the moraine, down which we slithered in a small avalanche and pushed out into the centre of the Tasman to look back. The first part of our descent appeared quite impossible, so much so that I could barely make out how we had come down, but our tracks down the last 2000 ft. told a different story, and I counted twenty-six consecutive linked turns, which must be just about a 'record'! We reached the Tasman at 12.45 P.M., and were able, by keeping in well under the Hochstetter icefall, to obtain good running right down to a point opposite the Ball hut. Here we had to take off ski and carry them up and down great pyramids and ridges of moraine to the edge of the glacier; we then scrambled up the moraine of the Ball Glacier to the hut, which we reached at 1.55 P.M. To our



joy a chamois-hunter had seen us high up on the Tasman and warned the Ball hut 'bus, which waited for us to rest and drink and then took us down the bumpy moraine trail to the Hermitage.

Thus ended the finest piece of ski-mountaineering it has yet been my good fortune to enjoy, and I now look forward to the next time, if it comes, for I had barely skimmed the surface of the work that can be done in those parts. Besides these three main glacier basins, there are very fine trips to be accomplished in the Godley Glacier district, which has an Alpine Club hut at the head ; also in the Rakaia and Rangitata, as soon as these are rendered more accessible not only with huts but also by motor roads leading up the lengthy barren valleys coming from the plain. So far a lot of good summer ski-ing has been done, especially in the Godley area, and is described in various past numbers of the Australian and New Zealand Ski Year Books, but they have not been touched in winter or spring owing to the impossibility of bivouacking out at that time of year. Possibly some pioneering spirit will try to open up these districts by aeroplane, landing on the glaciers. This would be the most practical way of saving time and energy in reaching one's base. In this respect some very good work has been done by Captain Mercer of Air Travel N.Z., who has made landing grounds at the head of several of the more remote mountain valleys S. of the Mt. Cook area. He has already carried several parties of summer climbers and kept them supplied with food. Many of the glacier névés should be suitable for landing grounds, since they are mostly fairly flat, and the snow, especially before 10 A.M., is smooth and hard except after fresh falls.

The New Zealand Alpine Club is erecting new huts whenever possible, but hut building is far more expensive and arduous a matter than in Europe, chiefly owing to lack of materials anywhere near the site and the time and expense in packing them in when obtained, as often as not on men's backs. Only a small minority of the mountain valleys boast trails, and these, unless fairly well frequented, soon become merged into the bush again, since there is no labour anywhere near at hand for their upkeep. Hut fees, in the areas where the huts belong entirely to the N.Z. Alpine Club, are very reasonable, especially considering that they are stocked with food and fuel. In those areas, however, where they are under the control of a commercial company, very strict bargaining is absolutely necessary before starting a trip. Also guides' fees are out of all proportion to European charges, the charges for the ascent of the more famous peaks being quite ridiculous. Unfortunately no maps worthy of the name are available, and it is therefore not safe for any but a thoroughly experienced party, or a party containing one New Zealander in it, to venture out in doubtful weather, since a compass is of little or no use without reliable maps. The Southern Alps form an ideal area for the keen mountaineer and ski-mountaineer, but for 'amateur' parties, unless they have ample money and time at their disposal, they are at present too expensive and unsafe from weather causes.



It is greatly to be hoped that the Government will realize the asset to the nation provided by the Alps, and will make an effort to have all huts under the control of the N.Z. Alpine Club with a fixed scale of charges, and also to settle definitely an official guiding tariff for the whole country. The institution of a proper school for guides, awarding diplomas on the lines of the S.A.C. and D.u.Æ.A.-V., is much to be desired, but, I fear, is far too Utopian at present. The few first-class guides, who are every bit as fine as the crack Europeans, are much booked-up in advance, and inexperienced strangers, not in the know, may be put into the hands of any odd man around the hotel, irrespective of his knowledge of mountain-craft. This, of course, applies only to the very crowded and would-be 'European' resorts. In the smaller places, especially those managed by past climbers, the consideration and care shown to all types of parties leave nothing to be desired.

Mountains have made the fortunes of Austria and Switzerland; there is no reason why they should not do so in New Zealand as well.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Similar remarks written in 1904 appear in *A. J.* 22. 30, 122.—*Editor.*