

"PERGE ET PERAGE."

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THE NEW ZEALAND ALPINE JOURNAL

A RECORD OF
MOUNTAIN EXPLORATION AND ADVENTURE
BY MEMBERS OF THE NEW ZEALAND ALPINE CLUB

EDITED BY S. A. WIREN

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Mt. Aspiring—H. E. L. Porter, A.C.	75
The Red Hill Country—Geo. Simpson and S. Scott Thomson	84
Xmas Climbing at the Hermitage—J. A. Sim	91
First Ascents and Explorations—A. P. Harper, A.C.	100
The Disaster on the Tasman Glacier— G. E. Mannering, A.C.	119
The Wilkin Valley—J. S. Shanks	130
In Memoriam	137
Alpine Club Notes	140
The New Zealand Alpine Club	142

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FRANZ JOSEF.

Terminal Face first visited by Sir Julius von Haast, 1865.
1st exploration C. E. Douglas, A. P. Harper (A.C.), 1893/4.

FOX.

Terminal face 1st visited by Sir Julius von Haast, 1865.
1st exploration and ascent, Chancellor Rdg., A. P. Harper (A.C.), alone, 1894.
1st to reach head, Dr. Teichelmann (A.C.), H. Newton (A.C.), *P. Graham*, 1903.

BALFOUR.

1st visit C. E. Douglas, alone, 1889, exploration completed with A. P. Harper (A.C.), 1894.

LA PEROUSE.

1st seen by C. E. Douglas and A. P. Harper (A.C.), May, 1894.
1st partial traverse Dr. Teichelmann (A.C.), H. Newton (A.C.), R. S. Low (A.C.), and *A. Graham*, 1905.
No one has reached head of this glacier.

STRAUCHON.

Discovered and explored by C. E. Douglas, alone, 1892.

HORACE WALKER.

Discovered and explored by A. P. Harper (A.C.), alone, 1894-5.

DOUGLAS.

Discovered by C. E. Douglas, alone, 1889.
1st exploration A. P. Harper, and Maori, Jan., 1895.

MACKERROW.

Discovered and explored by C. E. Douglas, alone, 1889 (Mr. Mueller's party).

NOTE.—Where the heights vary I have generally adopted those of the Westland Survey as more likely to be correct for peaks on the Divide.

The Disaster on the Tasman Glacier

By G. E. MANNERING.

Since the inception of mountain climbing in New Zealand, which may be said to date from the visit of the Rev. W. S. Green and Herr Emil Boss, with their guide, Ulrich Kaufmann, in 1884, we have been singularly free from fatal accidents in the Tasman district, where most of our mountain ascents and the majority of our explorations have been effected; the one notable exception having been the disaster on the Linda Glacier, when Mr. W. S. King, A.C., with guides Thomson and Richmond, was overwhelmed by an avalanche in February, 1914. This was a mountaineering accident pure and simple. The present disaster is in a totally different class, and happened to a party of walkers out on the open glacier, where practically no climbing dangers are present.

On the 18th of January, 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;

with Acting Guide J. E. E. Blomfield, aged 20, left the Hermitage (2444ft.) for the Malte Brun Hut (5700ft.), distant some 23 miles (allowing for the sinuosities of the route). They went by motor for about 10 miles, and walked a further three miles to the Ball Hut (3900ft.), which they left in good form and spirits for the Malte Brun Hut—a further nine or ten miles. The actual surveyed distance between these huts in a direct line is seven miles, but walking on the ice necessitates many detours.

They reached the Malte Brun Hut in 4½ hours, which is fair average time. The weather was then somewhat

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 seven guides and eight volunteers, mostly seasoned men and used to glacier work. We reached the Ball Hut at 11.50 a.m. and added one to our number 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 led down a steep descent of about 100 feet, and across the Ball Glacier, then on to the clear ice of the Hochstetter, below the great ice-fall, up this glacier about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles, then across the great medial "Rudolf" moraine on to the clear ice of the Tasman—roughish, but easy going to any practised walker. About one 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—two hours and thirty-five minutes 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, 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 Acting-Guide 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 on the stretchers, but soon found that carrying was out of the question, as the numerous crevasses and water-holes were all hidden by about six inches of new snow, through which the carriers were continually falling. We therefore improvised sledges of the stretchers, with teams of three 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 two miles the snow thinned out and we were compelled to carry, which we did, amongst the ridges and hollows of the ice and occasionally on the thin moraine of rocks. After about one mile of such carrying we reached "Pine Apple Rock,"

where the bodies were left reverently 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 one 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 party 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 feet above the clear ice on either side. The last of the carrying party came in to the Ball Hut at 10.30 p.m., and about 30 men slept there that night.

Next morning (Wednesday, 22nd January), a party of 23 men set out from the Ball Hut at 4.45 a.m., and by dint of great exertions, came in there with all bodies by 8 a.m. A further carry of three miles—six men to a stretcher—brought all to our waiting motors, three 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 having run down. It is apparent from the silent evidence of Miss Brown's watch that the disaster occurred at about 12.49 p.m. It was made clear from Hilgendorf's evidence that the storm was

not bad a short distance below the hut till some time after 12 noon, and that consequently the party had fair conditions for the first hour or so of their walk. This would mean that they were not a long time in the heart of the storm—say, under two hours. Hilgendorf states he found the bodies at about 2.30 p.m., and that they were then "already stiff." I think he must have found them earlier, as he was at the Ball Hut by 3.30 p.m., and he could not possibly have gone this distance in an hour under the difficult conditions of the weather. He had no watch. It has also been subsequently revealed that there were three spare unused Cardigan jackets in the ladies' rucksacks; apparently no attempt had been made to put on these warm garments.

My own considered opinion, after alpine experiences extending over 44 years, during which I have been caught in many alpine storms, is that the disaster was caused by lightning. I have searched the 41 volumes of "The Alpine Journal," which reports alpine fatalities regularly, and much alpine literature besides, and cannot find a parallel case where a whole party has perished so suddenly from mere exposure. The annual death roll of the European Alps is well over 100 deaths per annum. A great many cases are reported, but I can find none (where the period of exposure is known) where death has occurred under a period of about 12 hours, and then it is usually only one or two members of the party who have succumbed. There are numerous instances of resistance for periods of 24 and 48 hours and even longer, without death resulting.

I can quote from memory some cases of our own in the Tasman district:—

Green, Boss and Kaufmann stood out all night at 10,000 feet on Mount Cook in a bad N.W. storm, climbing down next morning.

Mr. Lowe broke his ankle on the Rudolf Glacier, crawled down to De la Beche bivouac, and existed for 10 days in the open with very little food. He is alive to-day.

Mr. James Smith, the roadman at Glentanner, sat out on the ice at De la Beche Corner with two ill-clad ladies all night in a N.W. storm, and they got to the Malte Brun Hut next morning.

Vic. Williams, with Mr. K. Neave and myself, walked down from Malte Brun to Ball Hut last November in a terrible blizzard, when most of the time visibility was limited to twenty yards or so, and we were covered with icicles, but without experiencing any distress from the exposure.

Lightning is very varied in its effects upon animal bodies, and frequently takes life without leaving any sign of burning. In the present case it has been established that the party were in the centre of a great thunderstorm—severe lightning was observed in their vicinity by parties at the King Memorial Hutt (7000ft. up the Mount Cook route) from the Ball Hut, and by Guide Hilgendorf as he was coming down from Malte Brun, and whose axe was hissing and spluttering to such an extent that he towed it behind him with straps rather than carry it in his hands. The wet condition of their clothing would render them liable to conduction of electric fluids, more especially as they were walking in water off and on, being in the slushy area of ice.

It seems contradictory, but damp clothing has been known to save people from shock as "a high frequency current utilises only the surface of a conductor." The following note is supplied me by a leading Professor of Physics in the University of Bristol:

"If the flash actually struck any one of them, that one would have been burned or singed, but if it was very close to them without actually striking any one, it is quite feasible that the induced effect, in the human body, of the flash, would be equivalent to electrocution, giving sudden death. If they were all reasonably close together, as in walking, the same flash might quite well have the same effect on all of them."

Another high authority (Professor Buchanan, of Liverpool) states:—

"The presence of a storm at the time when death is stated to have occurred . . . will in most cases point to the true cause of death."

He further states that:—

"Post-mortem rigidity comes on early," which was the case, and a further condition laid down by Dr. Buchanan was clearly obvious in the case of one of the bodies.

I merely quote these few authorities to support my opinion, and could give many more, but refrain from labouring the point. At the same time, it is important to know, as the Mount Cook Tourist Company has already been attacked for allowing tourists to go out inadequately clothed, which criticism, in this case, was not altogether justified.

The only writings found on the bodies were notes of photographic exposures. They were in the "slushy area" of the glacier, where the melting begins on the surface snow—two of the bodies being in water. With one exception, the girls' clothing was inadequate to resist stormy weather conditions, though it must be remembered that they did not use their Cardigans.

The obvious lesson to learn from this terrible affair is that the guiding 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, although it is recognised that it is difficult to persuade inexperienced parties to carry sufficient warm clothing against emergencies. 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 making 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 Guides Thomson and Richmond, were destroyed by an avalanche in the Linda Glacier. No doubt freedom from accident has been owing largely to the care exercised by the local guide; but the very absence of accidents has become a danger by lulling us into a sense of security and blinding us to risks which are frequently taken during the tourist season at Mount Cook Hermitage. Many 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 an alpine storm.

With a view to minimising the risk from bad weather on the Tasman and Rudolf Glaciers, a movement is now on foot to erect a Memorial Hut to those who perished on the site of the present De la Beche Bivouac, at the junction of the two glaciers. The cost is expected to be about £500, and subscriptions are

solicited from alpine enthusiasts and from friends of the deceased. Subscriptions should be sent to:

Mr. A. P. HARPER,
President, N.Z. Alpine Club, Wellington.

Mr. G. E. MANNERING,
10 Tui Street, Christchurch.

PROFESSOR ALGIE,
University, Auckland.

Of the sorrow and grief arising out of this terrible tragedy it is difficult to write. Words quite fail to express the sympathy which the members of this Club feel for the bereaved relatives in the loss of five valuable young lives. The old tradition of the guide caring for his tourists has been nobly upheld by young Blomfield, who divested himself of much of his clothing to protect as far as possible the girls in his charge, and his example will not be lost on those who follow in his footsteps.



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CONTENTS

	PAGE
First Ascents and Explorations	147
An Ascent of Mt. Sefton—Kate Gardiner, A.C.	173
Tasman by a New Route—R. Syme	176
An Ascent of Mt. Haidinger—L. V. Bryant	188
Pluto Peak and Mt. Sir William—J. A. Sim	191
Climbing at Headwaters of Mathias River— J. D. Pascoe	206
On the Spurs of Mt. Aspiring—Eric Miller	216
In Memoriam	227
Alpine Club Notes	228
Otago Section Notes	258
Conference re Control of Guiding	287

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both West Coast and Hermitage service cars and vice versa. This will enable climbers to go from (say) Waiho to Hermitage and on to Timaru without an extra charge or the trouble of applying for a refund of the unused return ticket, and should encourage transinsular crossings.

DE LA BECHE REFUGE.—The Club, at the request of certain friends of the victims of the storm on the Tasman Glacier in January, 1930, headed the appeal for funds to erect a Memorial Hut at De la Beche "Corner." A sum of just under £400 was raised and contracts let to Mr. Jack Pope for building and Mr. Kenneth Grinling for packing. The contractors did wonderful work, completing the hut inside five weeks, and quite apart from a matter of business, the Committee feel that its special thanks are due to those concerned. It is also felt that mention should be made of Mr. Archibald Scott's enthusiastic efforts, for his energy is chiefly responsible for the successful issue. Thanks are also due to many firms for gifts of material and accessories and to those who subscribed the funds.

The hut was formally opened in the presence of some fourteen people on the 4th April, by the President. The date was fixed on the 42nd anniversary of the establishment of the old bivouac by Messrs. G. E. Mannering, A.C., P. H. Johnson and James Annan. Mr. Mannering was one of those present and spoke at the function, and also, at the President's request, put in the first screw of the Memorial Tablet.

SCENIC RESERVES.—The large reserve taking in the whole watersheds of the Cook and Karangarua Rivers has been gazetted. Mention was made in our last issue of the representations made on behalf of the Club to secure the extension of this reserve, which now covers some 175,000 acres, and some of the finest scenery and climbing in the Dominion.

MEMBERS.—This year 16 new members have been elected and 17 new "subscribers." The Committee are aware of many more who must be qualified for membership and hope that these will submit their names for election during the year.

OFFICERS.—The following officers were elected at the last Annual General Meeting:—*President:* A. P. Harper, A.C. *Vice-Presidents:* G. E. Mannering, A.C., and Eric Miller. *Hon. Editor:* S. A. Wiren. *Hon. Secretary:* W. G. Mace. *Hon. Treasurer:* A. S. Sutton-Turner. *Committee:* H. Chambers, A.C., T. A. Fletcher, J. S. Shanks, R. Syme, Dr. E. Teichmann, H. F. Wright, A.C., and the above.